

THE
KNIT
BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Spring 2020



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Bruce G. Paulsen, Esq.
Chairman, Board of Trustees

The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt
President & Executive Director

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The largest and most comprehensive mariners' service organization in North America, SCI serves as a voluntary, ecumenical agency affiliated with the Episcopal Church. Founded in 1834, SCI affirms a basic precept of faith communities: welcoming the stranger, regardless of faith or background.

Visit donate.seamenschurch.org/give to contribute online, mail your check using the attached envelope or call 212.349.9090 to give over the phone with a credit card.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

As the new President & Executive Director of The Seamen's Church Institute (SCI), I would like to wish everyone a happy spring!

Prior to my arrival at SCI in February, I served as an Episcopal minister for parishes, schools, and missions in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Illinois, Massachusetts, Australia and South Africa, including twelve years as rector of a church on the Chesapeake Bay. My broad range of experience extends to my military background as a naval officer, as well as Director of Planned Giving at Opera Philadelphia and various positions in commercial banking.

Over the years, I have seen firsthand the impact of volunteers, and in fact, my introduction to SCI occurred as a result of the gifts of Christmas at Sea

(CAS) volunteers. The first time I recall hearing about the hands-on work of SCI was from my neighbor and parishioner, Captain Jack Austin. Jack is a career tugboat captain who retired this past year from Moran Towing Corporation. After serving in Vietnam, Jack returned home and bought a tugboat in Philadelphia with two partners. About 37 years ago, Jack received a CAS ditty bag. He carried some of the contents with him his entire professional career. He spoke about the services that SCI provided to crew members—especially those needing transportation to and from the train station or airport, or simply to the store. These functions may seem inconsequential compared to the work that SCI performs in seafarer advocacy or mariner education, but it meant a great deal to Jack and his partners. When his partner, Jack Silva, died last year, Jack had named SCI as the beneficiary of his memorial donations.

In this issue of *The Knit Before Christmas*, we spotlight the role of volunteers in our Christmas at Sea process. In order to illustrate the big picture, we present you with many statistics. But numbers alone fail to convey the full story. Captain Jack's experience is just one example of the power and reach of Christmas at Sea volunteers in a capacity that belies the numbers. Our appreciation for your efforts is immeasurable. Thank you for your support.

Most faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MARK". The letters are stylized and connected.

KNIT NOTES

Thank you for the favorable feedback on the newly imagined fall 2019 *Knit Before Christmas* newsletter. Inspired by your comments, we will continue to include personal stories and keep you updated on what's new and exciting. For this issue, the focus is on volunteers. I hope you enjoy it as much as we have enjoyed putting it together for you.

This has been a remarkable year for CAS. Eight thousand one hundred and eight (8,108) eye-catching knits were packed into 4,054 ditty bags by 23 volunteer groups in Port Newark. Another 7,156 knits were sent to the men and women navigating our inland waterways, as far south as Baton Rouge all the way up to Pittsburgh.

We would never have been able to accomplish this without you. CAS is entirely volunteer driven and a labor of love. I attribute the success and longevity of this 121-year-old tradition to the dedication and commitment of our volunteers. Whether you knit, crochet, sew, collect toiletries and snacks, personalize Christmas cards, help pack, or make a monetary donation, you are an essential part of this amazing process.

The power of volunteering is far reaching. It is truly impressive what we can achieve together. We never lose sight of or take for granted the important role volunteers play. Thank you for all you do to make CAS vibrant.

With gratitude,



P.S. Questions about volunteering? Don't hesitate to contact me at cas@seamenschurch.org.

Join the conversation on Ravelry. You'll find Christmas at Sea under groups. Follow Christmas at Sea's Facebook page to meet our warm online community of knitters. View your fellow CAS knitters' work, read messages from Program Manager, Joanne Bartosik, and stay in-the-know about special CAS activities.



Christmas at Sea Angels

Christmas at Sea Angels are knitters and crocheters who help and encourage our novice knitters. Please contact us at cas@seamenschurch.org if you would like to be a mentor or if you are looking for one. Thank you, Angels, for nurturing the next generation of CAS knitters!

Alice D. • Maine

Andrea C. • New York

Barbara C. • Maryland

Barb U. • Ohio

Deborah P. • UK (United Kingdom)

Jan C. • Nevada

Jeanette Marie S. • New York

Kathie K. • Pennsylvania

Melissa S. • New Jersey

Meredith W. • Wisconsin

Robin S. • Nebraska

Sue F. • California

Suzanne S. • Delaware





GENERATIONS OF GIVING

Since the Seamen’s Church Institute’s founding almost 200 years ago, one goal guides everything we do: improve the life of the sailor/seafarer/mariner. Dispersed among brick-and-mortar facilities in four states and all along the U.S. inland waterway system, our staff of 35 currently attends to the mariner’s vital needs primarily through advocacy, education and chaplaincy. Each of us possess a unique area of experience and expertise, but we share the same passion: Championing the Mariner.

We could not accomplish this objective without you — our volunteers.

For the Christmas at Sea program alone, we are entrusted with almost 20,000 knits and ditty bags donated by volunteers. These gifts are then catalogued and packaged – again with the aid of volunteers – and delivered to seafarers calling on the Port of Newark, tugboat mariners operating out of Staten Island, and mariners working on U.S. inland rivers. We run a tight ship. During the 2019 Christmas season, our Director of Maritime Education & Training, Captain Stephen Polk, actually jumped in and helped distribute Santa sacks to ships in Port Newark while visiting from Houston. Although she receives support from fellow development staff, pastoral care, and others, Christmas at Sea Manager Joanne Bartosik is the single SCI employee dedicated to the program full-time.

“The name Christmas at Sea is a little misleading. It sounds as if this is a seasonal program; however, with all the moving parts and the volume of donations flowing into Port Newark, it takes a full calendar year to prepare. This effort is fueled by the enormous number of talented knitters across the US, and the support of several key volunteers who have been working with me to help start regional CAS groups in their area.”

Our super supporters commit time and money in many ways, and over a long period of time. 2019 marked Cargill's Denise Santiago's eighth year volunteering during SCI's Port Packing Day. Cargill, named America's largest privately-held company according to *Forbes*, is an international producer and distributor of agricultural products, and a major event sponsor for SCI's biennial fundraiser, Mountain Challenge. Eric Pierot, Caitlan Reilly (*additional story on page 10*), and Utsav Nigam, who competed on Cargill teams for Mountain Challenge, also took part in Packing Day.

The Hughes family is a stellar example of the dedication of our volunteer partners. For several years while employed as the Operations & Global Technical Manager at Cargill, Captain Rob Hughes organized a group to participate in Port Packing Day. Having accepted the position of Genco’s new COO last year, he took the initiative and created a combined crew of volunteer packers from Cargill and Genco. Genco is a leading provider of international seaborne drybulk transportation services.

“I blended Genco and Cargill because it was a great opportunity to bring together two companies who share a common vision in supporting mariners,” said Rob. “During my time at Cargill and currently with Genco, both organizations are ardent supporters of the Seamen’s Church and unflinchingly strive to ensure the well-being of all our sailors.”



“We were determined to clear that wall of shelves because we knew each bag more meant one more mariner would receive such a great gift.”

— Karen Hughes



Rob's wife, mother-in-law visiting from Florida, and daughter also joined the Port Packing Day team.

"My husband remembers receiving a bag from SCI during his shipping days. In return, as part of the shipping community on the corporate side, he has had many opportunities to attend and support SCI and their great events," said Karen Hughes. "Personally, I was attracted to CAS because I am a knitter and saw the program as a great and unique way to give back, even in a small way, to the many sailors around the world. When my husband told me that Genco was doing a packing day event, I was intrigued to see and be a part of how the process operates to completion and couldn't pass up the chance to be an extra set of helping hands."

With festive Christmas music filling the Christmas at Sea room, employees from Cargill, Genco and the Hughes family together emptied out the cubbies and assembled ditty bags to pack 57 Santa sacks in just over two hours. These Santa sacks are earmarked for seafarers in ships calling on Port Newark and Port Elizabeth from the Monday before Thanksgiving through the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

In addition to her enthusiastic participation in Port Packing Day, Karen Hughes and her mother both knit for the program.

"Having been taught to knit by my mother over 10 years ago, this was my first time participating in such a project and I found it a bit intimidating at the start,

"Packing day was an amazing experience. Helping package the hats and scarves really made me feel a part of giving the mariners something special for the holidays."
— Emma Hughes

as I generally stick to baby blankets with fairly simple patterns. These were the first hats and scarves I ever tried and I wanted them to be perfect. Knowing how much it means to the mariners themselves kept me motivated as a solo knitter. My husband relaying how he recalls getting a bag over 15 years ago and how much it meant to him, helped keep my motivation high.

This is a gift that really makes an impact in the present, and also creates a cherished memory that lasts long after people come ashore," said Karen.

Including their daughter in SCI's Packing Day festivities was a natural decision based on the Hughes family's tradition of giving.

"My husband and I are big advocates of teaching our children about giving back since they are blessed with a comfortable life that affords them a distance from the hardships others face on a daily basis. Bringing our daughter allowed her to see just how many mariners are far from their loved ones, especially over the holiday season and how a simple act, such as packing the bags for them, can serve them.

Emma's school, Morristown-Beard, is also a fierce advocate that all students participate throughout the year in community service-based activities to further their understanding of being a citizen of the world and helping others. SCI Packing Day was an opportunity to show her that from the corporate level down to the individual, service is an important part of our family ethos, and extends from the work life to our home.

Character is built over a lifetime, but giving her a strong foundation in community and helping others is a cornerstone for us as parents."



A long-time member of the Prayer Shawl Knitting Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church in Ocala, Florida, Elizabeth Diener had proposed the idea of knitting for Seamen's Church last summer. The ladies in the group loved the idea as did their Reverend, Dr. D. Ronald Watson, Jr. He strongly encouraged the project because he thought it was a great cause, and his past churches had also knitted for mariners.

When the Ministry mailed their package of knits to Port Newark in September, Elizabeth had no idea that she would have the opportunity to "see the end result," and actually participate in packing the ditty bags with her daughter, granddaughter and son-in-law in Port Newark in December.

"The Packing Day experience is one I will always cherish and share with my Prayer Shawl knitting buddies back in Florida."

— Elizabeth Diener

"We have visited our children and grandchildren in NJ during the Christmas holiday for the past few years. This year, our daughter, Karen, invited me to come to the Seamen's Church facility in Newark to help, along with Genco and Cargill employees, pack hundreds upon hundreds of hats, scarves, toiletries and sweets to be sent to mariners away from home during Christmas. I was thrilled to be asked and what a great afternoon it was to be part of this wonderful packing experience. It was seeing a project from beginning (knitting) to end (packing for distribution)."



All
50 States + Italy
& Armed
Forces Europe

162
Volunteer Knit
Groups

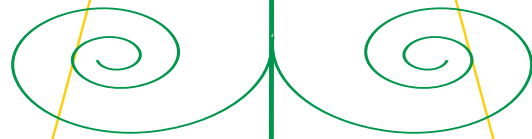
1,009
Volunteer Individual
Knitters



19,924
Knits & Ditty
Bags Delivered to
Christmas at Sea
in Port Newark,
New Jersey

8,108
Knitted Gifts
Packed with
Cards, Personal
Care Items &
Treats into
Ditty Bags

7,156
Knitted Gifts
Sent to Baton Rouge,
Houston, Paducah,
Pittsburgh & Vicksburg



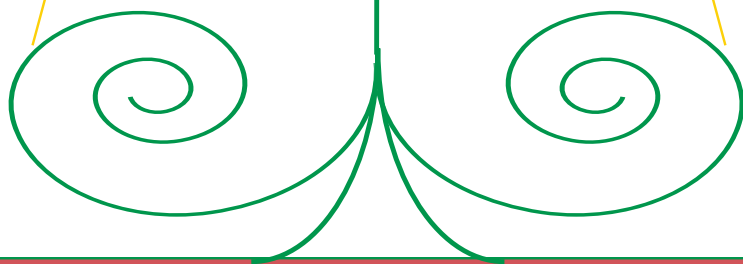
12
Ditty Bags Packed into
Santa Bags
in Port Newark by 167
Volunteers

Volunteers Pack 1
Knitted Gift & Handmade Card
for Each Mariner into Boxes,
1 Box per Boat

327.6
Santa Bags Delivered
to Seafarers Working on
165
Ships Calling on
Port Newark by SCI
Chaplains &
Ship Welfare Visitors

122
Ditty Bags Delivered
to Mariners
Working NYC Harbor
Tugboats by
SCI President &
Executive Director,
& CAS Manager

68
Maritime Companies
Received Boxes for
Mariners Working
the Inland Rivers



Christmas at Sea 2019



“I knit and sew for Christmas at Sea because participating gives me the chance to offer some small happiness to someone who may be feeling isolated. I can keep them warm and lift their spirit through the CAS program. I also love participating in a project started by our knitting forebears!” — Ellen Harvey

2019 Top Needleworkers

INDIVIDUAL KNITTERS

Helga K. of NC • 913 pieces
(second year in a row!)

Judy H. of NY • 228 pieces

Melanie S. of PA • 197 pieces

KNITTING GROUPS

St. Ann’s Episcopal Church of Old Lyme, CT • 471 pieces

**St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church
of Smithtown, NY • 377 pieces**

Trinity Reformed Church of North Plainfield, NJ • 254 pieces

Ellen Harvey, Super Volunteer

"I am tremendously grateful to super volunteer, Ellen Harvey, for playing an integral role in our annual Port Packing Day event. Ellen’s familiarity with the program combined with her enthusiasm made her uniquely well suited to clarify instructions, answer questions, and keep track of the number of ditty bags packed." — Joanne



Caitlan Reilly



"At the office, we work together really well, but I didn't know that we would get along so well over the course of the challenge. I am happy that our natural competitiveness could be put to good use!"



Another awesome SCI volunteer, Caitlan Reilly, worked a Port Packing Day for the first time this year. Having competed as a member on a Mountain Challenge team (SCI's fundraiser featuring a three-day test of endurance over mountains and water inspired by mariners), and supported our Silver Bell Awards Dinner in NYC, Caitlan was looking for another way to join in SCI's mission. "It's easy at Christmas to get caught up in checking items off your list, and forget the real spirit of the season," said Caitlan. The packing experience inspired her to give even more. "My grandmother taught me to knit, and I'd like to try knitting for Christmas at Sea next year. Anything that Seamen's Church does is good in my book!"



T. Alvarez helped his mother, Katherine, at one of our Port Packing Days, and was a very hard-worker! For his traditional photo by the Christmas at Sea tree of knits, T. chose to hold one of Paula W. of Delaware's octopus ornaments. Some of our volunteers send in small extra pieces to go with their knit gifts for the mariners. Little extras and particularly fine workmanship always create a wave of excitement and appreciation among the packers!

A LIFE ON THE WATER



Byron Druin, an AB Deckhand for Kirby's tugboat Cape Henry operating out of Staten Island, was a recipient of one of SCI's Christmas at Sea ditty bag gifts this year. Kirby tugboat mariners, usually 7-8 crewman on each boat who hail from all over the country, work a rotation of three weeks on and three weeks off with alternate years on Christmas.

"We accept it as part of the business," said Byron. "But it's nice to know that there are people out there who are thinking of us at Christmastime outside of the company we work for."

In addition to his duties as deckhand, Byron also serves as the cook on the boat. Crew members are responsible for their own breakfast and lunch, and then Byron prepares dinner for the group every night. Because both of his parents worked when he was growing up, Byron started cooking for his family at an early age before they came home. He discovered that he was pretty good at it.

"Cooking relaxes me," explained Byron, and is a good antidote to the hard physical labor performed in all kinds of weather on the boat. For the Christmas meal, he always tries to cook something special for the crew. This year he served prime rib and shrimp cocktail.

"The needlework on this hat and scarf is beautiful. The idea that someone would take the time to make these wonderful gifts for other people that they don't even know; it really means a lot," says Bryon. "I can tell you that tugboaters are going to wear their knits to death. I'm glad that they are made of really strong yarn!"

"I'm from Maine, so I'm no stranger to cold weather. I know how to dress to stay dry. But let me tell you: it gets stinging cold out there on the water at 03:00 in the morning! I will put these to good use."

The ditty bags also include toiletries, candy and other items like crossword puzzles and sewing kits. "This lotion will be great! Our hands get really chapped out there even when we wear gloves!"



Christmas at Sea
The Seamen's Church Institute
118 Export Street
Port Newark, NJ 07114

You are important to us!

Please contact me if you or your knitting group has a change of address, a new email address or any questions about knit or financial gifts. If you are in the neighborhood of SCI's International Seafarers' Center in Port Newark, I would love to meet you and your group! I am also happy to give a presentation, in person or even via Skype for those of you outside of the greater NYC area. I look forward to hearing from you! – Joanne (cas@seamenschurch.org 973.589.5828.)

Pictured: Trey volunteers with his mother Sandra, and other members of the Women in Maritime Operations (WIMOs) West Kentucky Chapter at a Packing Day hosted by Chaplain Baldrige at SCI's facility in Paducah, KY.