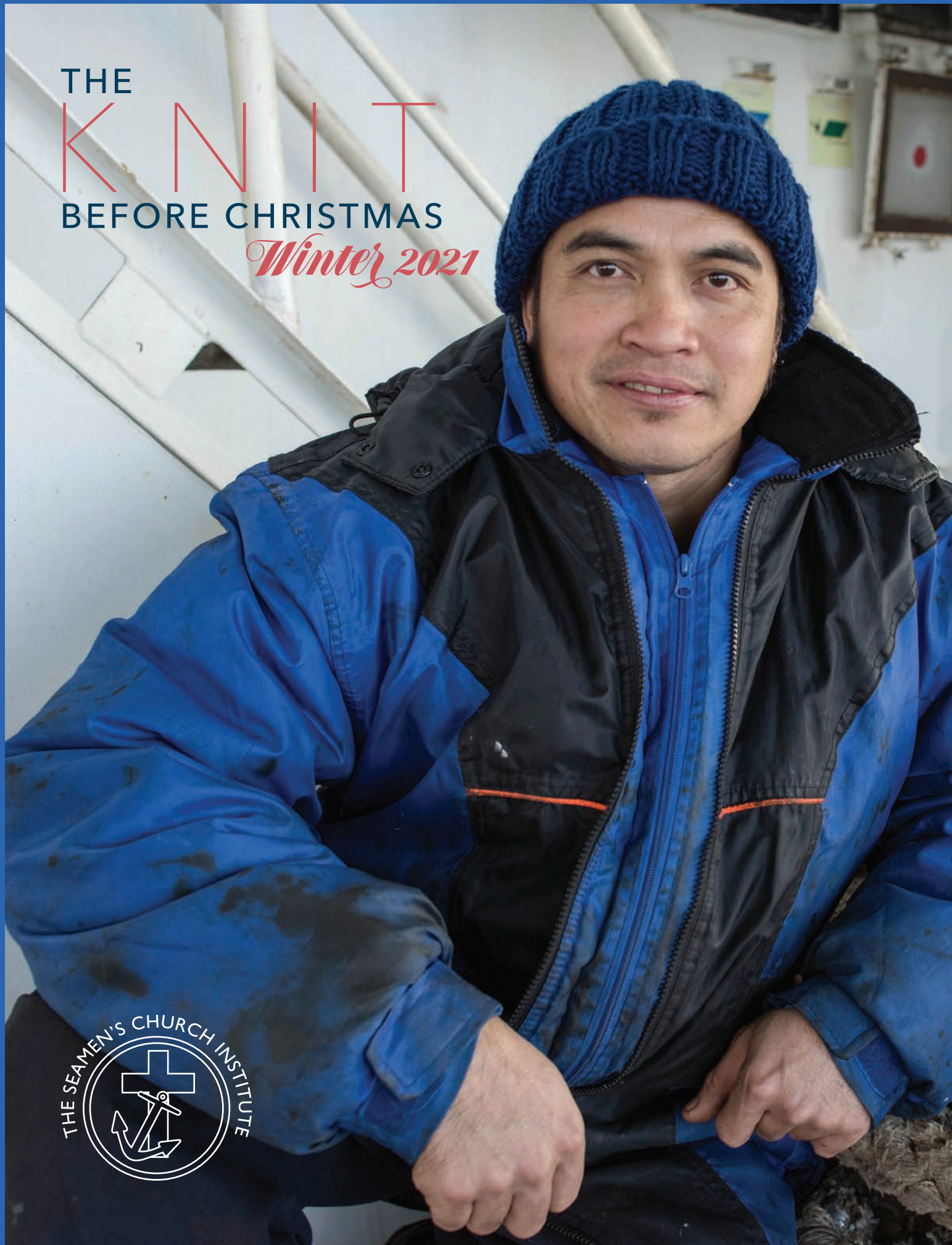


THE
KNIT
BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Winter 2021



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Stories, stories, stories. One of my favorite weekly activities is listening to the StoryCorps radio segment during Friday's broadcast of Morning Edition on NPR. I can still recall many of the stories that I've heard over the years—stories of joy, stories of pain, stories of hope, stories of loss. Sharing stories from our personal experience can change how we see others and therefore radically change how we relate to one another. We connect through our stories.

Christmas is a time for stories; the stories from our own childhood or adulthood, as well as that first Christmas story. Most of us are familiar with the broad strokes of the story. Perhaps we hear the story in the voice of the Peanut's cartoon character, Linus, from A Charlie Brown Christmas, when he

steps forward and tells the story of Mary and Joseph, Bethlehem, a manger, and the shepherds in the fields watching their flocks by night.

Christmas at Sea has its stories too. Tales of seafarers and sailors receiving knitted caps during that first Christmas of the Spanish-American War in 1898, which launched our Christmas at Sea ministry. Stories that merchant mariners like Captain Rob Hughes tell of when he was away at sea for the first time and received his Christmas at Sea ditty bag from SCI and how he will never forget what it meant to him. Or the story of retired Captain John Fink requesting that Christmas at Sea ditty bags be sent to the crew of his former Military Sealift Command vessel, the USNS Loyal out of Yokohama, because he doesn't want those mariners to feel forgotten while separated from their families. These simple gifts, made by hand and with love, represent warm hugs sent out into a cold place.

At its heart, the Christmas story is a story about hope; it is a story about light overcoming darkness. We just turned the page on 2020, which was by all accounts a challenging and difficult year. And now we welcome 2021 as a year of new possibilities. The transition between these years was not overpowering. Rather, the transition was subtle much like the dawn of a new day where the rays of sunshine build throughout the morning until we eventually feel the full brightness and warmth of the light. That is my wish for each of you this year—a hope that the light in your life always overpowers the darkness.

Whether you are a knitter, a crocheter, a financial supporter, a friend, or a recipient of our Christmas at Sea ministry, I thank you for being part of SCI's family. We are all in this together!

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MARK". The signature is stylized and appears to be written in a cursive or semi-cursive script.

The Reverend Mark S. Nestlehutt
President & Executive Director

KNIT NOTES



Dear Friends,

Welcome to a new decade and a new edition of *The Knit Before Christmas*.

In preproduction meetings, SCI Director of Communications, Nancy Van Epps, and I had numerous conversations about what to include in this issue. I believe the feeling is unanimous, this past year was bleak. The challenges we faced tested our patience and perseverance. Personally, 2020 reminded me of the mirrored fun house on the boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach. As a teen, I discovered if I stayed focused on the red exit sign on the back wall, I could find my way out of the maze. The exit sign analogy has been my COVID coping mechanism.

Circling back to our preproduction discussions, Nancy and I struggled to put into words what one collective exhale would sound like. And simultaneously, it came to us in a Beatles' lyric—here comes the sun. It has felt like a long cold lonely winter.

But winter does not last forever. I have concluded from watching my houseplants bend and twist in the direction of the light from the living room windows, we all do a little better facing the sun.

With that image in mind, we lean toward the sun as we recount some of the positive aspects of 2020. Confronting an unprecedented pandemic of global proportions, we found creative solutions to new problems. **Because of the extraordinary success of #Stayhomeandknit, CAS grew by 20%.**

Together with the growth of the program, comes the expansion of our menu of patterns. CAS volunteer, Beth Hall, a member of the Crochet Guild of America, and originator of our crochet Seafarer's Watch Cap pattern, developed a crochet version of our popular Seafarer's Scarf, which we are launching in this issue.

Port Packing Day, ordinarily, a one-day event at the International Seafarers' Center, stretched into Port Packing Week to adhere to COVID safety protocols. Understandably, social distancing limited the number of volunteers we could accommodate in the space, but every knit and crocheted item was packed and delivered. I asked my colleague, The Rev. Thomas Rhoades, SCI River Chaplain to share his experience organizing packing groups in his region covering U.S. inland waterways. He gladly consented.

We have not reached the exit sign on the back of the fun house wall; however, I can see it illuminated in the distance. Optimistically, as we turn our back on 2020, I concur with the late George Harrison—it's going to be alright. Stay safe everyone.

With gratitude for all you do in support of SCI,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joanne Bartosik
Manager, Christmas at Sea

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



A Christmas at Sea Tradition

by Joanne Bartosik

Port Packing Day has become a Christmas at Sea (CAS) tradition and an event I look forward to in November. For me it marks the launch of the CAS season and it happens to be a lot of fun. Annually, we invite our Port Newark and Port Elizabeth neighbors to join us for one rollicking day of packing Christmas gifts for mariners. In 45-minute time periods, teams form an assembly line around an oversized worktable and pack handmade knit and crocheted garments in drawstring “ditty” bags. Included in these gift bags are personalized Christmas cards, candy and other snacks, essential travel size toiletries, and small games, such as a deck of playing cards. A dozen ditty bags go into one large Santa Sack, which SCI Chaplains deliver during their daily ship visits.

With Christmas themed music blasting from my old combination cassette and CD player, more than half our packing is completed in one day thanks to the efforts of these energetic volunteer teams. Local church, school, and community groups complete the process in the weeks that follow. Concurrently, in locations such as Baton Rouge, Houma, Vicksburg, Houston, and Paducah, volunteers are staging similar packing events for mariners working on towboats and barges along the 25,000 miles of connecting inland waterways.

Last year was different. I had not imagined a global pandemic nor the havoc in its wake, but it occurred to me that CAS was going to be more important now than ever before. Without inputting any data, I realized the #stayhomeandknit (and crochet) campaign was a hit by the volume of mail. This outpouring of generosity was a great motivator and kept me focused on the task at hand—getting everything packed and delivered.

Of course, our primary concern was everyone’s safety. Considering the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), together with Tim Wong, SCI’s Director of the International Seafarers’ Center, we developed COVID protocols.

The big pivot was transitioning Port Packing Day into Port Packing Week. Stretching the packing out over the course of a week, gave us adequate time to thoroughly clean and wipe down the CAS workroom in between groups. We created a “check in” station at the entrance to the building for sign-in and temperature checks. Teams were limited to eight members. Masks were mandatory. We provided the hand sanitizer and gloves. My old “boom” box played the holiday CD my son mixed and there was palpable, infectious holiday spirit.



“This year was different. I had not imagined a global pandemic nor the havoc in its wake, but it occurred to me that CAS was going to be more important now than ever before.”



Understandably, increasing numbers of COVID cases and the situation with so many people working remotely, had a direct impact on the number and size of the packing groups. Nevertheless, at the end of the “week,” with a lot help from Genco Shipping, represented by the Hughes family, the Council on Port Performance - Workforce Development Implementation Team (WDIT), Port Newark Container Terminal (PNCT), Maher Terminals, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, 111 Santa Sacks containing 1,332 ditty bags lined our 3rd floor hallway.



Although New York Shipping Association (NYSA), McQuilling Partners, US Maritime Alliance Ltd (USMX), and East Coast Warehouse, were unable to join us, they supported us tremendously by sending generous donations to include in the ditty bags. WISTA US (Women’s International Shipping & Trading Association) organized its first charity 5K race, a virtual Turkey Trot, and helped raise funds for SCI.



Camaraderie has been a strong undercurrent throughout 2020. It is amazing what we have been able to accomplish together. I am deeply grateful to all the Port Packing Week participants and to the thousands of CAS volunteers across the country and beyond for sharing our mission and vision of making Christmas a little brighter and a little less lonely for mariners.

Packing & Delivery

by Chaplain Tom Rhoades

Christmas At Sea is a great opportunity to share our hearts with seafarers and mariners by giving them homemade hats, scarves, helmets, vests, and other knitted and crocheted items. Hundreds of knitting groups and individuals all over the world devote tens of thousands of hours knitting and crocheting apparel as an expression of God's love for our men and women working on waterways. Receiving these gifts is deeply meaningful to those away from their families working on ocean and river vessels during Christmas.

Christmas At Sea is also a wonderful opportunity for SCI to empower congregations, organizations, and individuals along our waterways to engage in ministry with the mariners in their communities. In addition to making knits, churches and civic organizations receive apparel that has been collected and processed from SCI's International Seafarers' Center in Port Newark, New Jersey. SCI sends 100 lb. boxes of the apparel to packing groups in September and October. These groups are usually churches but can also be Sea Scouts and Sea Cadets, Veteran Clubs and so on. During the year these groups raise money to supplement the knitted items with essential toiletries, outdoor magazines, packaged treats (if allowed by the maritime company), puzzle books, a season's greetings message from SCI reassuring mariners that we are here for them all year long, not just at Christmas, Christmas cards from church members, and beautifully made, original Christmas cards from children. It's really neat when children and adults decorate the outside of the boxes with Christmas and maritime pictures. In early and mid-November, packing groups receive stickers from SCI River Chaplains for each box. The sticker identifies the name of the company, boat, and number of crew. These identifiers are placed on the outside of the boxes, then packed and taped shut for delivery to company offices and warehouses. The boxes are then distributed to their boats so that the crews who are working during Christmas can open them on Christmas Day.

This year during packing we wore masks, reduced the size of our packing groups, and spread out the tables between packing stations to maintain social distancing. In the Gulf and on the Inland waterways, over twenty groups with more than 100 participants packed gift boxes for 68 companies in 77 locations. Additionally, SCI Chaplain Kempton Baldrige made deliveries on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day directly to boats. In total, SCI River Chaplains and River Chaplain Associates delivered over 1,500 boxes providing Christmas gifts to more than 9,700 mariners. COVID in no way deterred our outreach. In fact, we delivered more this year than any other year in our history. God bless our mariners, seafarers, and our churches and community groups who are reaching out to mariners living in their communities.



CHRISTMAS AT SEA BY THE NUMBERS



All 50 states, Washington, D.C. + Luxembourg and the United Kingdom

287 new volunteers

1,013 individual knitters/crocheters/ditty bag makers

148 church, civic, and community groups

TOTAL DONATIONS

22,647 knit and crocheted garments (20% increase)

3,070 ditty bags (7% increase)

PORT NEWARK PACKING

436 Santa Sacks or 5,232 ditty bags (29% increase)
delivered to 196 vessels calling on Port Newark (18.7% increase)

INLAND MARINERS

8,700 knits and crochets sent to Christmas At Sea
for mariners on the river (21.5% increase)



TOP INDIVIDUAL DONORS/NUMBER OF DONATED ITEMS

Helga K., NC 1,086 (3rd year in a row)
Judy H., NY 340
Christopher B., MA 220

TOP GROUPS

St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Old Lyme, CT 456
St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church, Smithtown, NY 307
St. John's Episcopal Church, Little Silver, NJ 251



Stay home and Knit

SCI Chaplain Associate Craig Klein has delivered Christmas at Sea boxes and comfort to mariners working the holidays along U.S. inland rivers for four years. Due to COVID protocols, this year he instead carried SCI packages to shoreside offices where the company planned to handle direct distribution to the boats. During delivery to marine transportation company Amherst-Madison, employees were assigned to help Craig carry the boxes from his car to the office.

The chaplain said everyone was wearing masks, and it was cold and windy that day. He was feeling less like a chaplain and more like a delivery person, when one of the helpers bumped elbows with him.

"Thank you, Santa!" the man says with a twinkle. "I work on the boats and I can't tell you how much these gifts mean to us. Sometimes on the river, this is all we get for Christmas."

The man spoke from the heart. "We look forward to them every year. Please let the knitters know that we wear the hats and scarves all the time."

The same pandemic exasperating acute anxiety and stress levels for so many mariners and seafarers, and the population in general, has coincidentally produced an environment conducive to knitting and

crocheting at home. *Forbes*, *The New York Times*, and *British Vogue* have all run articles in the last month extolling the therapeutic benefits of knitting while practicing social distancing at home. When CAS began the #Stayhomeandknit campaign this spring, we did not anticipate the SCI community's overwhelming response.

The end-of-year numbers verify what we began to suspect anecdotally in October. (See *By the Numbers* on facing page.)

With the support of our needlework volunteers, and our packing groups, SCI programs delivered when mariners and seafarers needed us the most. Together, this year, this challenging year, we made a difference.



Stacey Rhoades, wife of SCI Chaplain Tom Rhoades, kindly granted permission for the use of her painting as an illustration for this story. Stacey taught Art for over 20 years in public schools and her private studio in Arkansas. She now spends her days painting in and around Baton Rouge, Louisiana, preferring to paint on location, or en plein air. Recently she has been painting homes in her neighborhood, often traveling by bicycle to set up and paint.



BARBARA BODDEN

A Legacy of the Sea

Although she was raised in Scarsdale, a suburb of New York, Barbara Bodden has felt an affinity for the sea for as long as she can remember.

"As a girl, my family drove into New York City along the Westside Highway, and I would crane my neck to see if the *Queens: Mary* and/or *Elizabeth* were in," says Barbara. "I would watch all of the ships go past and dream of a life on the water. But back in those days, girls didn't pursue careers in the maritime sector."

She was fortunate to have sailed on many kinds of boats and ships during her lifetime; from an Alcoa freighter to the Caribbean to the *Delta Queen* on the Ohio River; sailboats on Long Island Sound and canoes on the Amazon; big cruise ships and smaller cruise ships. Over 20 years ago on a Rhine River cruise, she met another woman who looked like she was knitting a scarf and discovered a fellow SCI knitter from Kentucky!

Her childhood love of the water has only grown with her genealogy hobby and curiosity about her ancestry. On her father's side, she is descended from Thys Barentsen Swaim and Pierre Billiou, founders of Staten Island. One of the Swaims in her line was Jacob Cropsey Swaim, an oysterman who joined the New York City Police Department and then the Quarantine Department of the Port of New York, where he transferred to the Light House Department at Tompkinsville. He lived for many years at the Elm Tree Lighthouse.

"From the very beginning, Manhattan was a trading city with an international population. With SCI in the center of marine pursuits on South Street, I can imagine that my family would have been heavily involved with the organization through the years."

An inveterate needler since the age of 10, Barbara finally ran out of projects. She was thrilled to read about Christmas at Sea in *Parade* magazine and knew that she had found a new knitting community. Raised as an Episcopalian, she recognized that this would be an excellent charitable organization to support.

"Supporting SCI is a way for me to honor my ancestors," says Barbara. "I also want the mariners to know that someone is thinking about them not just at Christmas, but all year long. Every stitch is a stitch of love. Stay warm!"



"Genealogy is a great hobby of mine. I discovered that I am a descendant of a long line of seamen. Including SCI in my estate planning is a way to honor my ancestors."

- Barbara Y. Bodden,
Roper Legacy Society &
1898 Society Member



THINK FORWARD...YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH A PLANNED GIFT.

As the new decade begins, you can improve the quality of life for essential mariners by making a planned gift to SCI.

Estate planning is not limited to wealthy individuals. Everyone should have a plan to make sure their intentions for both family members and preferred charities are clear.

All gifts count, no matter what the size. Legacy gifts sustain SCI's important work.

You can decide how to allocate your gift. If you have a special interest in Mariner Advocacy, the work of our Chaplains, or Maritime Education, we will gladly work with you to make sure your gift goes in the direction of your choice.

A legacy gift is not irrevocable. You can change your mind should your financial situation change.

Establishing a legacy gift requires thought and planning. To learn more about planned giving, please contact SCI Executive Director, the Rev. Mark Nestlehutt at 212.349.9551.



Christmas in the Heartland

“When I started on the river at 19 years old, I didn’t have my own family. Any Christmas presents I received on the boat came from what my parents thought I needed, and Seamen’s Church.”

Ingram Steersman Colt Bolton has worked the holidays on U.S. inland rivers for 13 years.

“You plan to be well-prepared for winter, but by this time of year, your scarf is often worn out or lost,” says Colt. The bitter weather can be particularly unsettling for new deckhands who are Southerners. “We travel the Mississippi and it gets cold on the Upper Mississippi, especially at night. They might think they know what cold is in Alabama, but they don’t.”

Frigid temperatures are not the only unexpected challenge for first-time mariners who work in December. “You have to take precautions and brace yourself,” says Colt. “Everybody experiences their first Christmas away from home differently. But the job still has got to get done, regardless.”

On the river, boats receive one Christmas at Sea box outfitted with knit and crochet gifts for each member of the crew, a personalized letter from the chaplain, Christmas cards handmade by schoolchildren, and other goodies. Colt says members of the wheelhouse always let the rest of the crew have first pick on the knits.

“When we opened the 2020 box, the lead man and our cook were both seriously eyeing a pair of hand-knit Alabama State Crimson Tide red socks – that was a situation they had to work out between them!”

River mariners generally stand two six-hour watches each day (Front Watch and Back Watch) for 28 consecutive days on the boat, and then they are home for 28 days. This year, Colt’s CAS hat “had 15 different colors including pink, purple and yellow.” While he was unpacking at home, his wife spotted the cap in his suitcase and decided it would be hers until his next placement in late January.

“I told Colt this morning that their true life story needs to be pitched to Hallmark as a Christmas classic rom-com,” says SCI Chaplain Kempton Baldridge. “I had originally contacted Colt after we helped him get a scholarship for a steersman course. I was calling to check on his availability in scheduling for the class. He said he had a slight problem. The chance to advance from the deck up to steersman convinced him that he needed to propose to his girlfriend, Melissa. She said yes, however, he realized that he couldn’t afford to both get married and travel to the steersman course. Long story short: With our support, Colt and Melissa had a dream wedding at the mariner-friendly St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in magical New Harmony, Indiana. Two months later, Colt attended the two-week steersman course and aced all four exams.

And they all lived happily ever after. Their blended family is one of the most delightful ‘happy endings’ I have ever encountered.”

R E S I L I E N C E S C A R F





Resilience Scarf • Designer: Beth Hall

Note: Chain 2 at the beginning of each row counts as 1 hdc.

Chain 143 loosely. (You may want to go up a hook size for this chain.)

Row 1: Working in back bump of each chain, hdc in 3rd back bump from hook and in next 40 ch; sc in next 4 ch & place stitch marker in the last st made; slip st in next 50 ch; sc in next 4 ch & place marker in the last st made; hdc in last 42 ch. Turn. (142 sts)

Note: Beginning with Row 2, work all stitches in the back loop only.

Row 2: Chain 2; hdc in next 41 st; at stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts & move stitch marker to the last st made; slip st in next 50 st; at next stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts & move st marker to the last st made; hdc in last 42 sts, turn.

Rows 3 & 4: Repeat Row 2.

Row 5 (short rows): Ch 2; hdc in next 41 sts; at stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts & move st marker to the last st made; slip st in next 50 st, ch 1, turn. Slip st in next 50 st, ch 1, turn. Slip st in next 50 st. At stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts in row below & move stitch marker to the last st made. Hdc in the last 42 sts, turn.

Row 6: Ch 2; hdc in next 41 st; at stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts & move stitch marker to the last st made; slip st in next 50 st. At 2nd stitch marker, sc in next 4 sts in row below with stitch marker, then move stitch marker to the last st made. Hdc in the last 42 sts, turn.

Rows 7-10: Repeat Rows 5 & 6 two times.

Rows 11-14: Repeat Row 2.

At end of Row 14, cut yarn. Finish both ends. Do not add fringe.

Finished Measurements:
Approximately 6.5" x 48"

Yarn: Worsted (Cat 4),
approximately 180 yards.
Sample is worked in Caron
One Pound

Crochet hook: US 1/9 (5.5
mm) or size needed for
correct gauge

Other supplies: 2 stitch
markers; yarn needle
for finishing

Gauge: 2 rows in hdc = 1";
6 hdc = 2"

Abbreviations:
Ch = chain(s)
Hdc = half double crochet
Sc = single crochet
St(s) = stitch(es)



*Top photo: Seafarer visiting SCI's
welcome center in Port Newark
models Resilience Scarf shown
with matching Dedicated Cap.*



A Profile in Creativity: Beth Hall

When Beth Hall and her husband purchased new chairs for the television room – also known as the yarn room, because that is where they store their stash and perform most of

their handiwork—they brought their respective needles and some yarn. In addition to checking for style, color and comfort, they practiced knitting and crocheting in a variety of chairs in the shop.

“Fortunately, the salesperson at the furniture store was also a needleworker so she totally understood! My husband knits and dabbles in crochet, while I mostly crochet with occasional knitting. He crochets like I knit,” says Beth. “We wanted to make sure that the chairs we chose would be comfortable for our favorite activity in the room.”

Beth learned to crochet from her mother, a Home Economics teacher who put her husband through veterinary school, and gave Beth and her sister a basic education in hand-work. Beth crochets for homeless shelters, child advocacy programs and Breakfast with Santa events as well as hats and scarves for mariners. She and her husband created a 15-foot cincture—a belt tied at the waist for an alb—for clergy at the Church of the Ascension in Chicago. (*An alb is a liturgical vestment worn in some services by Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran officiants.*)

Beth, known as Hosier Lady on the crafting website, Ravelry, carries top-notch credentials in the field. In 2012,

she was awarded a Certified Master Crocheter designation with the Crochet Guild of America (CGOA). The certification requires the submission of an extensive and pristine portfolio of work.

“I was intrigued by the process. You don’t know how good you are until you challenge yourself.” In five years, she was named co-chair of the organization’s Master program.

In July, Beth retired after 30 years of teaching computer technology at a career-technical high school and 14 years as an adjunct professor at colleges and universities. With a Master’s Degree in Educational Technology, she specializes in instructional design for online delivery. CAS is the lucky recipient of her skills.

A longtime supporter of the Christmas at Sea program, Beth is generously donating a new pattern for our volunteer crocheters. We are unveiling the pattern here, in this issue! In 2009, she adapted our popular knit Watch Cap pattern for crochet and now she has designed a matching crocheted scarf that corresponds to the traditional knit Seafarer’s Scarf!

Thank you Beth for giving the Christmas at Sea program, our volunteer crocheters and mariners, such a wonderful gift!



Keep up-to-date on all things SCI.

We would like to ensure you are receiving the latest news and stories from SCI. Please let us know if you have a change of address, receive multiple copies of our publications, or if we have your name spelled incorrectly. Details are important to us. (And, rest assured, we never share lists or information with other entities.)

Recently, we have expanded communications to include digital bulletins and monthly newsletters. To receive our enhanced electronic communications, we need your email address, if we do not already have it. For all updates, contact Erica Esson, Development Assistant, at esson@seamenschurch.org. Thank you.



Christmas at Sea
The Seamen's Church Institute
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