

Christmas At Sea 2020

Christmas At Sea signals happiness at sea when our Palm Beach Seafarers Center celebrates the 2020 holiday season by delivering gifts to each merchant seafarer aboard vessels at the Port of Palm Beach from December through January. As it has for more than 15 years, this PBSC tradition is part of the friendly and supportive relationships stevedores, dock workers and port community employees maintain with visiting mariners throughout the year. It shows our appreciation for seafarers hard work and sacrifice delivering goods from all over the world to our port.



The festively wrapped gift boxes include a variety of useful items with the favorites being special wool watch caps and scarves knitted for the seafarers by PBSC volunteers, which patterns are recognized worldwide as handmade for them. The boxes also include socks, dental care items, soaps, shampoos, CDs and DVDs, candy, games, stationery, books, magazines, and hand sanitizers.



As many as 30 vessels and 450 seafarers pass through the port during the holiday season. In the past, volunteers personally delivered as many of these gifts as possible. With the SARS-CoV-2-COVID 19 restrictions this year, PBSC has had to adapt its methods of packaging and delivery so that captains and mariners can receive their gifts dockside. Our physical

presence on the docks daily is important and reassures crews we are ready and willing to help them.

The mariners visiting the Port of Palm Beach are part of the global shipping community of 1.5 million seafarers. They deliver 90% of everything we use or wear from tea bags to sugar, clothes and cars, sometimes at great personal cost. At sea for months or years, mariners are separated from their families and at times are unable to talk with them because of faulty communications, environmental and weather issues, illness or injury. They may endure many risks at sea including changing schedules and reduction of manpower requiring 12 hour shifts 7 days a week, fears of COVID19 for themselves and their families back home, exhaustion, lack of sleep, exercise, and rest, mental fatigue, isolation and loneliness due to social distancing and cancelled group activities as basketball, piracy, shipwreck, abandonment, lack of food, and more.



With the pandemic came additional, unprecedented challenges associated with the slowdown of shipping traffic worldwide. Ships were halted at sea or berthed for months in ports where crews were forced to stay on board because of COVID-19 restrictions and not allowed visits by families or to return home. Some ships which made it to port during 2020 were abandoned at anchor, leaving crews stranded aboard ship without food, water and wages for long periods



of time. These pandemic-related risks can be as dangerous as those associated with piracy, shipwrecks, or bankrupt shipping companies.

Even though our Port of Palm Beach has been fortunate in not experiencing the problems of abandoned ships, the mariners on the ships visiting our port welcome a respite from the challenges of their seafaring life. The Palm Beach Seafarers Center offers visiting mariners recreation and relaxation, and a port transponder assists mariners in traveling between their ships and the center. For mariners facing shore leave restrictions because of the pandemic, PBSC makes virtual contact to offer assistance in various, often unique ways.



Photo courtesy of missiontoseafarers.org

We are grateful for the amazing kindness and support of our donors, partners, community organizations and volunteers who give so generously throughout the year and who enable us to offer a warm holiday welcome to our mariners. Their gifts of time, talents, and resources make our annual holiday tradition meaningful and memorable.

