

Seafarer Centers Need Our Help

By John McLaurin

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The holidays are almost upon us. Hundreds of millions of Americans will head to shopping malls or go online to order gifts for friends, loved ones and colleagues. People will worry about how the gift will be received, whether it will fit, if it is the right color, will it break or whether it is returnable. Few will give much thought to the hard work of those onboard ships that brought those goods to this country.

Hundreds of seafarers will spend this holiday season at sea or at distant ports of call thousands of miles from their families. Working on board ships is a solitary and lonely life. Seafarers spend months away from their home and loved ones, often working in very dangerous conditions. It is a profession that is taken for granted by consumers all over the world, but one that is critical for our economy.

These seafarers need our assistance and support. That is why the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, the Port of Oakland and other members of the Bay Area maritime community came together recently to raise funds for the Seamen's Church Institute, International Maritime Center. The recent luncheon event included a keynote address from Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, who expressed her gratitude and appreciation for the women and men who work onboard ships. The Mayor's support for the International Maritime Center and its volunteers was a wonderful acknowledgement of the hard work performed by individuals who are largely invisible to the general public.

Seafarer centers are located at various ports around the world, including Oakland, and provide much needed assistance ranging from transportation for a trip to a store to purchase personal items to something more serious involving counseling or help dealing with personal problems half a world away. Most of these services are provided by volunteers working on a shoestring budget.

To help explain the impact of this work, the Port of Oakland, a major supporter of the seafarer center, produced a [video](#) detailing the efforts of the center and the people they serve. The video is a tribute to the hard work of those on board ships and of a dedicated group of people who provide much needed help in a very quiet and unassuming way.

Please consider supporting your local seafarer center.

If you want to learn more about seafarer centers, here is a partial list:

www.seamenschurch.org

www.iscpolb-la.org

www.venturecd.net/seafarerscenter.org

www.baltseafarers.ang-md.org

www.seafarerscenter.org

www.catholicseafarercenter.org