



November 26, 2024

Christmas Ship Returns to Navy Pier Dec. 6 & 7, Bringing Over 1,200 Trees to Chicago Families

In 25th Year, Christmas Ship Committee, U.S. Coast Guard, and Ada S. McKinley Community Services Collaborate to Keep Joyful Tradition Alive

CHICAGO—More than 1,200 Chicago families will receive free Christmas trees to brighten the holiday season when Coast Guard Cutter Mackinaw, serving again this year as Chicago's Christmas Ship, returns to Navy Pier on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024.

The joyful tradition of serving the city's communities continues for the 25th year and is the result of wide-ranging coordination led by the Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee and its logistical partnership with the Coast Guard and Ada S. McKinley Community Services. The committee procures the trees in Northern Michigan through the support of private donations, and Mackinaw transports them to Chicago while conducting a regularly scheduled mission maintaining buoys on Lake Michigan. Once the trees are unloaded, they are distributed to community nonprofits, coordinated by Ada S. McKinley Community Services.

An official Ship's Arrival and Welcome ceremony is scheduled for Friday December 6th at 9:30AM. The MACKINAW will depart the south wall of Navy Pier at 745AM and go on a short demonstration cruise before docking at the west wall of Navy Pier adjacent to the Lakeside Stage at Polk Bros Park. Members of the press are invited aboard the MACKINAW for this short trip. The MACKINAW will be escorted by the Chicago Police Department Marine Unit and the Chicago Fire Department Air Sea Rescue Unit and members of the Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee will welcome the current and past Captains of the MACKINAW to Chicago with its cargo of holiday cheer. All are invited to help celebrate the arrival of Chicago's Christmas Ship.

The tree offloading will kick off Saturday December 7 at 8:30 a.m., followed by the official tree ceremony at 10 a.m. with Rear Adm. Jonathan P. Hickey, Ninth Coast Guard District Commander, and Ada S. McKinley Community Services CEO Jamal Malone, at the Lake Stage at Polk Bros Park on the southwest wall of Navy Pier. All are invited as Mackinaw crew and community volunteers off-load the trees onto trucks. Gurdon S. Hubbard High School's choir will perform, along with members of the Coast Guard Academy Glee Club, and Christmas Ship balladeer Lee Murdock will entertain the crowd.

Free public tours of the ship will be available from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Friday, and again Saturday from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

"As we sail into another giving season, we remember the legacy of Captain Herman and the original Chicago Christmas Ship. We take pride in carrying forward the tradition of brightening the hearts and homes of Chicago families", said George Kisiel, Chairman of Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee.

"Ada S. McKinley is honored to join the members of the Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee, the Coast Guard, and Navy Pier to help bring happiness and the warmth of the holidays by ensuring thousands of Chicagoans get a Christmas tree. These evergreen symbols embody the cherished values of family and community, bringing joy to neighborhoods throughout Chicago," said Jamal Malone at Ada S. McKinley Community Services.

Through generous volunteer efforts, more than 30,000 trees have been distributed at no charge to families across the city for more than two decades now. As an important part of Chicago's maritime heritage, this event honors the crew of the schooner *Rouse Simmons*, the original Chicago Christmas Ship, lost with all hands during a gale Nov. 23, 1912 while transporting 5,000 trees to Chicago.

“The Christmas Tree Ship mission is a privilege, truly unique to the Great Lakes and specifically to the Mackinaw’s legacy,” said Cmdr. Jeanette Greene, Mackinaw’s commanding officer. “Not only do we get to assist the generous organizations who donate the trees by providing a unique means of delivery, but we get to pay homage to the many sailors who’ve made the treacherous voyage down Lake Michigan in the stormy season.”

The reenactment of Chicago’s Christmas Ship is now a beloved holiday-season event, thanks to the continued efforts of additional partners, including Ada S. McKinley Community Services, the International Shipmasters’ Association, Chicago Marine Heritage Society, Chicago’s Navy Pier, the Navy League of the United States, Chicago Yacht Club, Friends of the Marine Community, and the Chicago Yachting Association.

For information and interviews:

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