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PRESS RELEASE

Annual Maritime Day Celebration at the Lightship Overfalls
Free Public Event Set for Saturday, May 17 on the Lewes Canal Waterfront

LEWES, Del. – Experience and celebrate maritime history and its impact on the region at the annual Lewes Maritime Day celebration at the Lightship Overfalls and Canalfront Park on Saturday, May 17, 2025 from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Lewes, known as the First Town in the First State, enjoys a heritage that is rich in both its maritime history and its current maritime interests.

Co-organized by the Cape May – Lewes Ferry and the Overfalls Foundation, and proudly sponsored by the Freedom Boat Club, Beach Flooring Designs, Henlopen Bait and Tackle, Children's Beach House, Midway Motion and Fitness, Greater Good by Children's Beach House, Groome Church, the Lewes Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Lewes, the event features exhibits and demonstrations, boat rides and vessel tours, and other activities and is free and open to the public.

The Coast Guard Cutter HERON out of Cape May will be a special guest vessel at the event and will be open for tours at the City Dock along with viewing of a pilot boat and description of its mission offered by the Pilots' Association for the Bay and River Delaware. Freedom Boat Club will be offering free boat rides throughout the day.

Cape Water Tours will be hosting a ticketed Maritime History Cruise at 1 pm. Tickets are available at <https://www.capewatertaxi.com/narrated-tours/history-happened-here/>.

A brief ceremony will be held at 11:00 a.m. to kick off the event and reopen the Lightship Overfalls (LV-118) for the season. The ceremony will include proclamations by local officials,

induction of local mariners into the Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame, and a remembrance of Overfalls Foundation members who have “passed over the bar.”

There will be live music this year – The Sussex County Shanty Singers from Historic Lewes will kick off the exhibition with maritime music and they will be followed by Minus 2 Plus 1 who will provide music throughout the remainder of the day. Grandpa Mac will also be onsite to provide replenishment.

“Lewes has a unique place in the annals of American maritime history of which the Ferry is a proud participant,” said Heath Gehrke, Director of Ferry Operations. “The festival is a fun and interactive way to learn more about maritime history, industry, and its many vocations. Come join us as we celebrate the U.S. Merchant Marine, its historic support of the Nation’s military, and the many careers it offers.”

“Part of the community’s rich maritime history includes that of the U.S. Lighthouse Service and U.S. Lifesaving Service, precursors to the U.S. Coast Guard,” said Michael Safina, event co-chair and Overfalls Foundation representative. “Lightships played a major role in the safe navigation of ships throughout our nation’s history and our guides are excited to help in bringing that story to light. We’re particularly delighted to have so many new exhibits and participants this year and we look forward to having the community help us reopen the ship for the 2025 season.”

The Lightship Overfalls and museum property will be open for free tours throughout the day. Various maritime participants will have displays at Canalfront Park, adjacent to the ship. It is a great way for scout groups, school groups, along with parents and kids of all ages to spend the day. Other activities include a water cannon display by the Lewes Fire Boat, a life raft demonstration by the Ferry, and a live radio operating station provided by the Sussex Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES).

Additional exhibitors include Cape Water Taxi, Delaware River and Bay Lighthouse Foundation, Children’s Beach House, Sussex Family YMCA, Henlopen Bait & Tackle, American Flag Guardians, Quest Adventures, the American Legion Post 17, Maps by Bob Pratt, Cape Artists’ Gallery, Groome Church, Kairos Outside Delmarva, Link Bank, Cape Henlopen School District Mentoring Program, , T-Tops Etc., the U.S. Coast Guard, Sea Tow Delmarva, Freedom Boat Club, the Lewes Yacht Club, the New Hope Canoe Club Ministry, the Pilots Association for the Bay and River Delaware, Lewes Bus, and Zwaanendael Museum.

In 1933, the United States Congress declared May 22 as National Maritime Day. The designation honors the contributions of the American merchant marine – civilians who have defended the freedom of the United States since 1775 and who executed the largest sealift the world has ever known during World War II. Observance of National Maritime Day also honors the maritime industry and the benefits it brings Americans in terms of transportation, jobs, goods, and recreational opportunities.

Owned and operated by the Delaware River and Bay Authority, the Cape May – Lewes Ferry is open year-round and has carried more than 50 million passengers since its inception on July 1, 1964. As an integral transportation system connecting the communities and economies on both sides of the Delaware Bay, the Ferry service is a significant catalyst for economic growth and regional tourism activity in New Jersey and Delaware. Its operations sustain over 4,000 jobs while generating tens of millions of dollars in local taxes and hundreds of millions in regional economic activity. For schedules and rates, please visit www.CMLF.com or call 800-643-3779.

The mission of the Overfalls Foundation is to preserve, teach and honor the lightships and their sailors of the United States and the maritime history of our community through the preservation and display of the Lightship Overfalls (LV-118) and its collection of associated maritime artifacts.

For Media and Sponsorship information, please contact:

David Shook, President
Overfalls Foundation
dave.shook@overfalls.org

James Salmon, Public Information Officer
DRBA
james.salmon@drba.net

Andrew Lyter, Executive Director
Historic Lewes
andrew@historiclewes.org

Betsy Reamer, Executive Director
Lewes Chamber of Commerce
inquiry@leweschamber.com