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Detroit District

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Fleet, flags receive annual blessing

DETROIT -- With the winds of March whipping across the Great Lakes, hundreds of people gathered at the Mariners' Church of Detroit on March 9 to participate in a traditional ceremony to bless their tools of the trade.

For 39 years, those who navigate the waterways of the Great Lakes have gathered at the church on Jefferson St. in downtown Detroit, to pay tribute to their fellow boaters lost at sea, recognize those who have contributed to the marine community and receive a blessing for their waterborne vessels.

"It is a service we all look forward too and take seriously as it ushers in another season for those of us who travel the Great Lakes for a living or for recreation," said Robert Kerr, captain of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District's tugboat *Demolen*. "The service is filled with moments of celebration and reflection as we recognize those ship captains whose efforts have contributed to the safety on the Great Lakes and remember those who have lost their lives."

Three ship captains received The Captain Lewis Ludington award, which recognizes captains who possess a high level of moral character and are very active in promoting the marine community in a positive manner.

This year, Capt. Alan J. Flood, Detroit Lodge No. 7, Capt. Constantine Markakis, Detroit Lodge No. 7 and Capt. Hicks P. McBeth, Port Huron Lodge No. 2 received the award from Ivan Ludington, Jr., the grandson of the award's namesake.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District Commander, Lt. Col. Thomas H. Magness, read the scripture lesson. "It was an honor and privilege to be asked to read during this service," stated the commander.

Following the scripture, the names of those who have lost their lives on the Great Lakes were read aloud and after each set of six names, the bell of the S.S. Octorara, located inside the church, and the Brotherhood Bell, located in the bell tower, were rung respectively.

The ship captains in attendance gathered at the church's altar for the presentation of four wreaths that were laid on the altar in memory of those who have lost their lives by storm, by reef, by fire and by collision. After a musical salute by bagpiper, Lynn Scott, more than 75 vessel flags were brought forward for the blessing of the flags by Rev. Richard W. Ingalls, who started the special service during his first year as the church's Rector in 1965.

One-by-one, the flags of vessels ranging in size from Coast Guard cutters to privately owned boats were introduced, displayed to those gathered, laid on the altar and then blessed for the upcoming sailing season.

As the doors opened and the winds of March whistled through the church, most of the departing mariners merely buttoned up their coats and smiled back at the gusting winds with a blessed look in their eyes.

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District civil works program encompasses 93,000 square miles area of the lower Great Lakes basin in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio. The Corps operates and/or maintains 104 navigation structures in the basin. Its mission includes real estate transactions, flood control, regulatory activities, disaster response, and mobilization readiness.