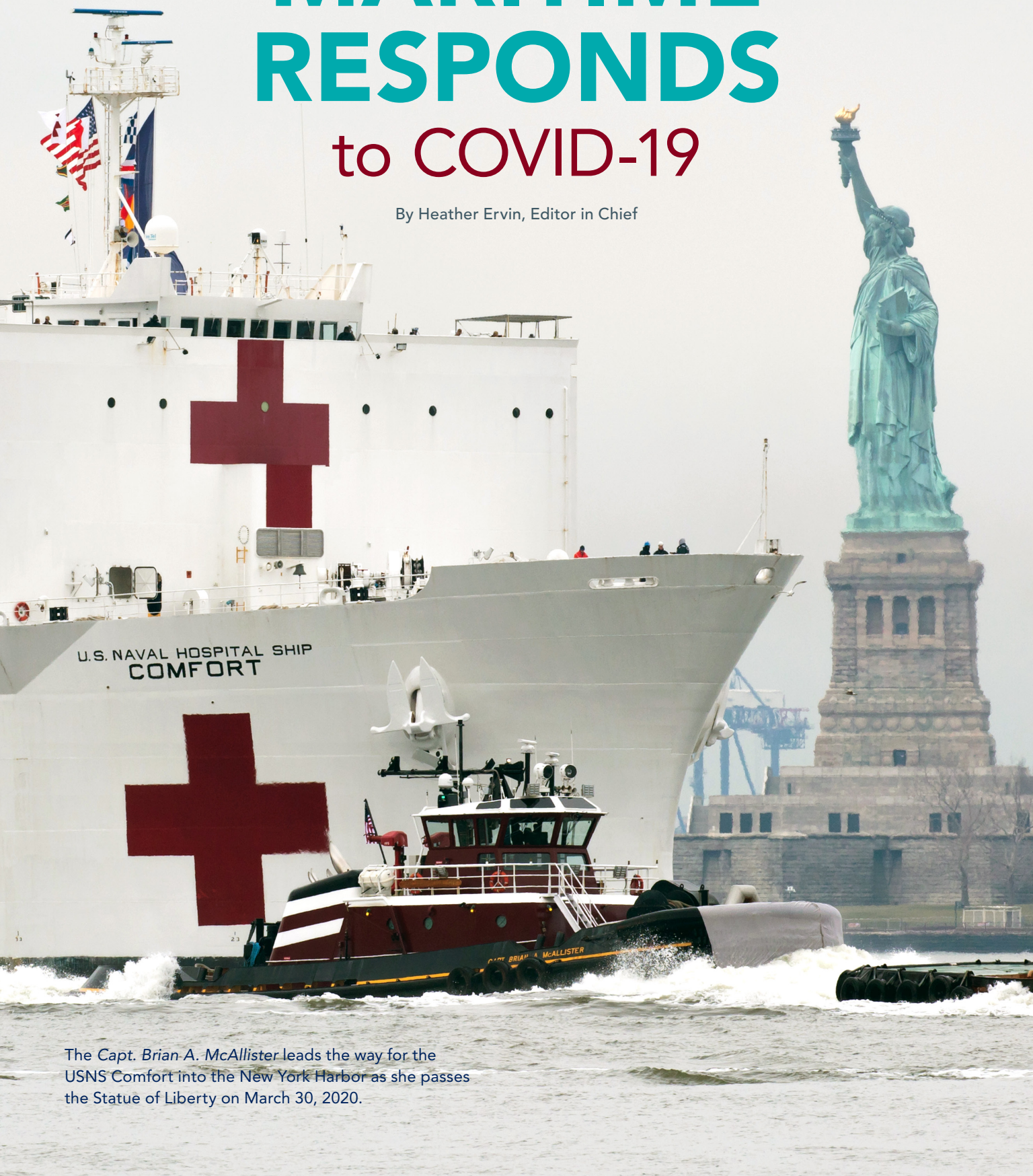




# MARITIME RESPONDS to COVID-19

By Heather Ervin, Editor in Chief



The Capt. Brian A. McAllister leads the way for the USNS Comfort into the New York Harbor as she passes the Statue of Liberty on March 30, 2020.

When things take an unexpected turn, as they sometimes do, those on our waters show up. Being a resilient industry with its own aches and pains, maritime plays a large role in aiding in crises around the globe. Perhaps few areas in the world understand this better than New York City.

Following the September 11 attacks, nearly half a million people were stuck in Lower Manhattan as authorities were forced to close bridges, roads and tunnels. Within minutes of the first attack, the New York City Fire Department deployed multiple fireboats to the scene, while a large convoy of merchant marine vessels, Coast Guard boats, tugboats and ferries quickly arrived to help evacuate the thousands of people, both unscathed and injured, from the water's edge near the World Trade Center. It was the largest maritime evacuation since Dunkirk. Following the evacuations, hundreds of vessels delivered supplies in the days after the attacks. As former Maritime Administrator David Matsuda says, "on one of our nation's darkest days, the Merchant Marine provided a beacon of light."

Today, the U.S. Navy hospital ship *Comfort*, manned by civil service merchant mariners, is again providing a very visible beacon of hope in Manhattan.

The *Comfort* has been deployed to New York to relieve shoreside hospitals that are swamped with coronavirus cases by providing care for the surplus of patients still in need of hospitalization. Its sister ship *Mercy* is fulfilling a similar role in Los Angeles. Mobilizing the two ships involved a massive effort involving multiple marine industry players.

ABS surveyors on both coasts made a key contribution. USNS *Comfort* had been docked in Norfolk since December 2019 to conduct its pier-side Mid-Term Availability. The ABS team worked with Military Sealift Command to prioritize critical maintenance and complete the availability, allowing the vessel to deploy to New York City. *Mercy* was in its homeport in San Diego making preparations for a large shipyard repair package scheduled to begin in April. Its activation was advanced to support California's request for the vessel to berth in Los Angeles. Round-the-clock survey preparation enabled an ABS team to substantially progress the required surveys while the crew prepared for deployment.

Prior to the arrival of USNS *Comfort*, Donjon Marine was given the task of dredging a berth at the Manhattan Cruise Terminal to make room for the gigantic vessel.

## Docking Comfort and Mercy

As noted in this issue's Industry Insights

column on page six, both the USNS *Comfort* and *Mercy* are equipped with 1,000 patient beds, 12 fully equipped operating rooms, eight intensive care unit beds, four radiology suites, and up to 1,200 Navy medical and communications personnel and more than 70 civil service mariners.

"This ship arriving is not just an example of help arriving in a physical form," says New York City Mayor de Blasio. "It's not just about the beds and the doctors and the equipment, it's also about hope, it's also about boosting the morale of New Yorkers who are going through so much. It's about saying to our heroes in those hospitals that help has come. That relief is on the way. I can't tell you how much this means, it is so much more than even we realize at this moment that our nation has heard our plea for help here in New York City and there could not be a better example of all of America pulling for New York City than the arrival of the USNS *Comfort*, some major, major moment in this long battle that we will be fighting against the coronavirus."

McAllister Towing provided equipment and maritime expertise needed to safely dock the hospital ship. Docking Pilot Capt. Robert Ellis was at the helm as the *Comfort* as it arrived in New York Harbor. Ellis had the power of four tugs in support to bring the 900-foot ship to

Manhattan's Cruise Terminal at Pier 90 in the Hudson River.

The Z-drive tractor tugs Capt. Brian A. McAllister, Ava McAllister, Alex McAllister and Ellen McAllister provided over 21,000 horsepower combined and, with their state-of-the-art propulsion, offered exceptional control in guiding the hospital ship safely to its berth.

McAllister's Vice President of Operations Capt. Steven Kress says, "In these turbulent times, it is important for McAllister Towing to support our nation in every way possible. Whether it is a job like docking the USNS *Comfort* or bringing in containerships daily to secure our nation's supply chain, we answered the call as we have done for more than 150 years."

On the other side of the country, Foss Maritime deployed four of its tugs—*Alta June*, *Bo Brusco*, and *Arthur Foss*, along with the tug *Patricia Ann Foss* from sister company AMNAV—to meet the USNS at the Port of Los Angeles "Angel's Gate" entrance on March 27. The tugs escorted the ship to a security sweep location before finally assisting her into the Port of Los Angeles Berth 93, where it will remain for the foreseeable future.

"Foss is proud and honored to assist this important vessel into port," says Paul Hendriks, general manager of the Foss Southern

Vane Brothers' tug Jacksonville operating in New York Harbor



Photo Credit: Max Gulliani



NETSCO was faced with the challenge of getting its overseas experts back to the U.S. during the outbreak.

California Office says. "Leading the way was Captains John Strunk, Ryan San Jose, Stan Sato and Drew Kerlee (AMNAV), who have a combined 85 years of experience providing safe operations in the harbor."

Foss Maritime has a long history of service to U.S. government agencies in time of national crises. It was called upon often over the past decade with response and service efforts following the Haiti Earthquake in, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and Hurricanes Maria and Erma in Puerto Rico in 2017.

"While we are happy to see the USNS *Mercy* docked at the port ready to serve, we hope her stay is a short one, which would indicate that the medical crisis is subsiding and the shoreside medical community can care for those impacted by the COVID-19 virus" says Hendriks.

### Business (Not) As Usual

Though the two hospital ships may be the most visible signs of maritime's response to the crisis, the entire industry is stepping up to the task of keeping the vital maritime transportation industry up and running.

Since shipping must go on, many operators and associated organizations are putting forth best practices for safeguarding workers against the virus and resources to help maritime transportation companies sustain continued business operations. The American Waterways Operators (AWO) launched a dedicated COVID-19 webpage containing information and resources to help mitigate the spread of the virus and guide the U.S. tugboat, towboat and barge industry in operating safely while continuing to serve the

American people during the pandemic.

The Coast Guard's National Maritime Center issued a notice outlining operational changes due to COVID-19. All 17 Regional Examination Centers and three Monitoring Units remain closed to the public until further notice. A transition to telework and shift-work is being implemented to balance mission-essential credential services with the need for a safe, "social distance" working environment for all employees.

The U.S. Coast Guard has also issued a Marine Safety Information Bulletin (MSIB 11-20) intended to help state and local officials identify essential marine critical infrastructure workers. The MSIB notes that the uninterrupted flow of commerce on the Marine Transportation System (MTS) is critical to both national security and economic vitality.

"During the ongoing national emergency, it is paramount that we safeguard the continued operation of the MTS in the face of the acute and evolving threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic," says the bulletin. "The MTS, which provides more than 90% of the domestic supply chain, is dependent on an extensive support network comprised of workers from both the private and public sectors."

Like AWO and the Coast Guard, Baltimore, Md.-based operator Vane Brothers has put into place policies and procedures with the goal of protecting the health and safety of its mariners. Capt. Rick Luliucci, vice president of operations for Vane Brothers, says the company has set up screening protocols and notification requirements for its employees, in addition to restrictions to the access of vessels.

Luliucci says that through the work of AWO as a communications facilitator, members of the maritime community have come together to share best practices and provide support.

Looking ahead, Luliucci says that one question everyone is asking is how will this event change the way operators and businesses conduct affairs in the future. "Our ability to adapt has been tested by this health crisis, but I believe the response has been generally positive from crewmembers, shoreside support staff, those in leadership positions, and mutually as members of the maritime community," he says.

And on a broader scale, companies like ship management firm Thome Group, headquartered in Singapore, has had to restrict crew rotations for a period of a month to safeguard its crews amid the outbreak and ever-changing global travel restrictions.

"Our crews and playing a major role here by taking all the necessary precautions as per the World Health Organization and company guidelines to minimize the risk of infecting themselves while in port and while interacting with any shore personnel," says Jamie Morgan Ramsamy, quality assurance manager for Thome Group.

Ramsamy says that the inability to rotate crew has presented a tremendous challenge. "The direct impact to our seafarers has resulted in the maritime community uniting to address their plight," he says.

### Shipyards and COVID-19

Most shipyards across the U.S. remain open and operational amid the pandemic. Bradley Kerr, director of sales and marketing for Detyens Shipyards, North Charleston, S.C., says that as an essential business, the shipyard has taken the responsibility of putting into place extra measures to ensure the health and safety of its employees and customers entering the shipyard. "We are following all CDC, state and local guidance to prevent workplace exposure to COVID-19," he says.

As far as how the virus has impacted work at the yard, Kerr says the company had to cancel a drydocking at the last minute. "This was 100% due to closing the borders to the U.K. and other European travelers," he says. "Owner reps and tech reps are unable to travel to the U.S., causing the project to be scuttled. We are also seeing an uptick in emergency repair requests and long-term lay berth requests."

In spite of this, Kerr says the shipyard, like so many of us, has been made more aware of general hygiene and hand washing practices. "The safety of our workforce and customers is the first thing we think about when we wake up and the last thing we think about before we go to sleep," he says.

Beyond the yard, Kerr says the pandemic has brought together shipowners, international shipyard agents, local agents, and others

to come up with ways to overcome the daily challenges that governments impose on the industry, while staying healthy and safe.

Back in New York, Derektor Shipyards in Mamaroneck, has followed suit in taking steps to keep its own workforce safe and healthy, while minimizing operations disruptions whenever possible.

Justin Beard, marketing manager for the shipyard, says that while the company continues to run its facilities, including two additional locations in Florida and one in Maine, its employees are practicing social distancing and improved hygiene procedures. Employees who can fulfill their tasks remotely have been advised to work from home, and customers are being asked to suspend all non-critical visits to its facilities.

"With the Department of Homeland Security designating maritime workers as essential employees, Derektor is fortunate to remain open," added Beard. "In New York, we continue to work on vessels so they're ready for service once the coronavirus crisis is behind us. We also stand ready to service or repair commercial or governmental operators in the New York area. As for our yards in Maine and Florida, we're operating with an abundance of caution and maintaining the high level of professional service our clients have come to expect."

Built on innovation and collaboration, Beard says that the maritime community has stepped up to the challenge presented by this outbreak. "Between shipyards making hand sanitizer to combat the shortage and superyacht owners creating a mobile app that tests for COVID-19, I'd say the maritime community is doing whatever it can to keep the world moving forward as we navigate through uncertain times. We will get through this together, and we'll all be a bit stronger and wiser from this experience."

### Preparing for the Inevitable

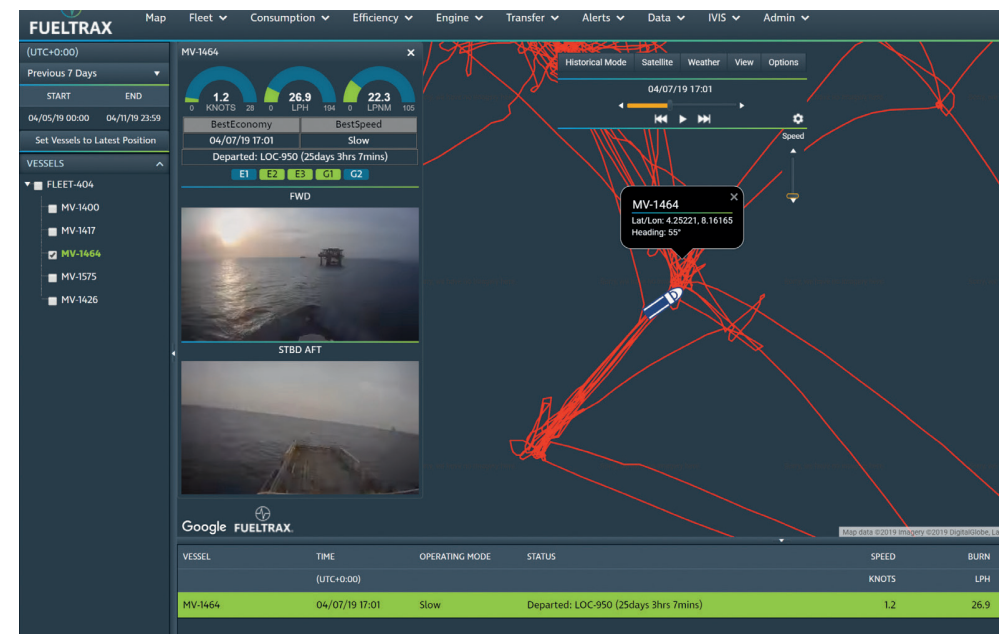
While very few people could have imagined that a global pandemic of this proportion would hit us in early 2020, some companies are using this time to get prepared for any future events.

Fortunately for Seattle-based naval architect and design business, Glosten, the company invested in technology infrastructure last year that provides its staff with the option to work remotely.

"Even though no one can say they were prepared for a pandemic and shelter-in-place orders, this event has brought our company closer," says Glosten President Morgan Fanberg.

Echoing similar sentiments to Derektor's Justin Beard, Fanberg says he believes this event will lead to businesses investing in virtual, remote work infrastructure to avoid future disruptions to business.

Another Seattle-based naval architecture



FUELNET, Fueltrax's logistics web portal, remains up and running for its users to access real-time fuel activity and vessel locations.

firm, Elliott Bay Design Group, says its team has adapted well to the new shelter-in-place orders, while still maintaining operations and serving its clients. The company says that it is using local resources when it can instead of flying its engineers across the country to conduct business.

Meantime, NETSCO, a Cleveland, Ohio-based naval architecture and marine engineering service provider is taking similar procedures to others in the industry with regard to hygiene and remote working. Despite this, the company had one hurdle that it was fortunately able to overcome.

"Our team of engineers and project management experts operate worldwide," says Richard Mueller, CEO and president of NETSCO and CEO Choice Ballast. "At the outbreak of the virus, we had a project manager overseeing a ballast water management (BWMS) retrofit in Turkey when the federal government began suspending flights to and from the U.S. We also had a NETSCO engineer and a Choice Ballast service manager in Lima, Peru, working on a 3D scan project for a BWMS installation."

### Remote Communications

Many regulatory compliance guidelines and inspectors are delaying to "non-essential boarding by non-crewmembers or consider phone or videoconference communications" as an alternative to person-to-person contact, according to Mueller.

E-learning companies Seagull Maritime and Videotel have responded to the emergency by launching a new program free to the maritime

industry called, "Coronavirus—How to Beat it."

It is not only commercial companies that are going digital, with critical services in ship visiting, along with center hospitality and transportation strictly reduced, the Mission to Seafarers is offering digital chaplaincy services for seafarers.

Leading global satcom services provider KVH Industries, Middletown, R.I., says it's been working around the clock to support the connectivity needs of the thousands of vessels and seafarers worldwide that rely on KVH for VSAT services.

Other service providers, such as Fueltrax, Spring, Texas, says it too remains busy. Maintaining a 99% uptime, Fueltrax's vessel management and logistics teams have experienced uninterrupted access to their vessel's data as they shift to working remotely.

FUELNET, the company's logistics web portal, remains up and running for its users to access real-time fuel activity and vessel locations around the world. As the company continues to provide its host of services to maritime customers, it predicts a foundational shift in the industry as this event will emphasize the need for remote insights to vessel activities and remote management capabilities.

Victoria Cantu, director of business development at Fueltrax, says, "The international maritime community and leaders are coming together to support these individuals, whose sacrifice may not be immediately apparent to other industries. Fueltrax remains in contact with its crewmembers to ensure that they know we are here to support them throughout these uncertain times." 📧

Photo Credit: NETSCO

Photo Credit: FUELTRAX