



By **Ron Hurtibise** · Contact Reporter



It's not a ghost ship, but that's not a bad guess.

Actually, the empty cargo ship anchored directly east of Fort Lauderdale Beach Park over the last three months is formally "under arrest" by the U.S. Marshal Service and must remain trapped there — with its 11-member crew on board

— until it can be sold at auction Aug. 11.

The M/V Delphinus, flagged in Antigua and Barbuda, is clearly visible from the heart of Fort Lauderdale's beachside resort area. But unlike the nearly 1,700 container ships that travel in and out of Port Everglades each year, this one has no containers to pick up and no destination on its manifest.

The ship's last cargo was offloaded just before it was seized April 23 because of a financial dispute between its owner and the company that chartered it, Afco Shipping Line LLC, according to Alan Swimmer, president of National Maritime Services Inc., which has custody of the ship under agreement with the federal government.

After the arrest, the ship's owner surrendered the vessel to the custodian, who is keeping the ship operational while its sale is pursued in a process similar to a bankruptcy.

Crew members from the cargo ship Delphinus that's anchored east of Fort Lauderdale pose for a photo with Paul Schweinler, far left, a volunteer chaplain at the Seafarers' House at Port Everglades.

On Thursday and Friday, the non-profit Seafarers House, which provides aid and comfort to mariners in distress, sent a boat to pick up crew members who had not stepped foot on dry land since the April arrest.

Crew members from the cargo ship Delphinus that's anchored east of Fort Lauderdale pose for a photo with Paul Schweinler, far left, a volunteer chaplain at the Seafarers' House at Port Everglades.



The ship's Ukrainian captain emailed the Seafarers' House, executive director Lesley Warrick said. "He said, 'We just really want to be ashore. Can we make something happen?'"

They were brought back to the Seafarers' House's Casa Del Marino, next door to Florida Power & Light's Port Everglades plant, and allowed to relax in the recreation room, buy snacks, drinks and personal-care items in the commissary, talk with the chaplain or play some pool. While three men were ashore on Friday, volunteer chaplain Paul Schweinler stayed on the ship, counseling crew members who remained behind.

Two federal programs designed to expedite customs processing for eligible travelers arriving into the United States are being tested this summer at Port Everglades.

Staff members at the Seafarers' House would not allow reporters to speak with the men, saying it could jeopardize their employment with the crewing agent that assigned them to the shipping line.

The Rev. Ron Perkins, Seafarers' House chaplain, said he became aware of the ship's arrest in May "and that there were 13 crew members on board who were denied shore leave."

"At one point in June, things were getting a little testy on board. People were under a great deal of stress, and they requested that we board the vessel at sea," he said.

Life on board the ship is boring but not uncomfortable, Warrick said. They sleep in bunk beds in small cabins. On-board internet service enables them to stay in touch with family members. They spend their time maintaining the ship. And they fish.

The captain told Warrick the biggest challenge is "not knowing when this is going to end," she said.

Seafarers' House spent \$1,800 to charter a boat for the two round trips and hire the armed guard required to accompany crew members who leave the ship, Warrick said.

The men will remain sequestered aboard the ship until a new owner buys it at auction. Proceeds from the sale will be used to pay for travel back to their home countries – Ukraine, Poland and the Philippines, Perkins said. During the arrest, crew members' wages are being paid in full by the custodian, which is also paying to keep food, water and fuel aboard.

Costs related to the custody will be reimbursed after the sale, Swimmer said.

If the auction does not attract a buyer, the ship could be sold for scrap and that revenue would be used to send the men home, Perkins said.

At any given time, about 30 ships are "under arrest" around the globe, he said. "It's almost always over a financial dispute." But usually the disputes are resolved before a ship goes to auction and arrests rarely last this long, Swimmer said.

The Delphinus docks once a month for fuel and provisions, then is sent back out to anchor at sea because that's cheaper than keeping it at the port, Swimmer said.

Crew members can't leave Port Everglades property and travel around the U.S. during the arrest period because the 27 continuous days of shore leave allowed under their visas expired while they've been aboard the ship, Perkins said. That's because the ship is in U.S. waters, and, according to the government, that means they've been "in" the U.S. while anchored on the ship.

Their continued presence on the ship in U.S. waters is technically a violation that the government is overlooking, Perkins said.

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<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/business/fl-ship-under-arrest-at-sea-video-20160730-premiumvideo.html>