



**COMING TOGETHER**



**CARRYING CARGO** Jet Blue employees deliver Shoebox Christmas gifts at Port Everglades. COURTESY

## Seafarers' House launches drive for seasonal campaign

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Seafarers' House at Port Everglades celebrated the International Day of the Seafarer in June. Special events included the launch of its 10th annual Shoebox Christmas campaign.

"Each year Seafarers' House delivers about 1,500 shoeboxes filled with everything from socks and work gloves to toothpaste and shaving cream, all of it donated," said Father Ron Perkins, Seafarers' House Chaplain.

The gifts show appreciation to the men and women who sail the high seas. The work can be dangerous and the hours are long. Separated from their families for months at a time, mariners endure many lonely hours.

"When we show up with gifts, they are overwhelmed and really grateful that someone remembered," said Jill Novacek for Shoebox Christmas. "The program creates thousands of acts of kindness."

Donations of empty shoeboxes and the small items to fill them are needed. Adult-size shoeboxes are packed with toiletries and little necessities for crew members who are far from retail outlets.

In December, small groups of volunteers will deliver the gifts aboard 100 ships. Those who participate serve as ambassadors for the community, Novacek said.

Volunteers hail from a range of organizations — churches, schools, nonprofits and businesses. They get as much joy as they give, she said. In addition to smiles of appreciation from the mariners, volunteers get an inside look at Everglades.

"Locals who have never been in port don't think about how we get all these goods," Novacek said. "It's an international experience that shows Port Everglades [is a welcoming] place."

Year round, Seafarers' House provides a place of refuge for mariners in the busy port, said executive

director Lesley Warrick said. Everglades is a leading container terminal and consistently ranks among the top three busiest cruise ports in the world.

"We want them to know that the rest of the world is paying attention to value they bring. These are tough jobs," Warrick explained.

The few hours crews are in port are vital to their wellbeing. Seafarers' House vans pick up sailors on the docks and ferry them back to the center. Services there include a small store, money exchange and recreational facilities.

"Our mission is to ensure that the people who work aboard these ships, as well as the port community, have a safe place to go when they need spiritual and emotional support, or simply want to stop in to use our free wifi to connect with loved ones," Warrick said.

For more information visit, [seafarershouse.org/](http://seafarershouse.org/) or call 954-734-1580.

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