



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CHICAGO'S CHRISTMAS SHIP CELEBRATES 100TH YEAR BRINGING TREES TO DESERVING FAMILIES

Friday, Nov., 30, 2012: Ship arrives at Navy Pier, 8:00 a.m. | Celebration at Chicago History Museum, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Dec., 1, 2012: Opening Ceremony and Tree Off-Loading at Navy Pier, 10am

In the early 1900s, lake schooners loaded up with Christmas trees from Michigan and Wisconsin and sailed them down to Chicago where families would board the ship and select a tree. On Nov., 22, 1912, the *Rouse Simmons*, one of the original "Christmas Tree Ships," sailed from Thompson, MI carrying nearly 5,000 trees bound for Chicago. One observer described it as a "floating forest." Sadly, the ship encountered a snowstorm and sank to the bottom of Lake Michigan.

In tribute to the *Rouse Simmons*, Chicago's boating community, led by **Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee**, has established an annual reenactment of the *Christmas Tree Ship*. This modern day celebration of Christmas spirit also embraces the spirit of giving by delivering all of Christmas trees to needy families in Chicagoland. These days, the *Christmas Tree Ship* is portrayed by the US Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw*. The trees are off-loaded from the *Mackinaw* by local youth volunteers and distributed to more than a thousand deserving families throughout Chicago.

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the sinking of the *Rouse Simmons*. The *Mackinaw* will arrive at Navy Pier loaded with trees on Nov., 30, and the opening ceremony and tree off-loading will take place on Dec., 1 at 10 a.m.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

On Nov., 30, guests are invited to the **Chicago History Museum** to view artifacts from the *Rouse Simmons*, meet authors and experts who have studied and written about this time honored tradition, and see photos never before on display. This event is free and open to the public—to register, visit ChristmasShip.org.

ORNAMENT DONATIONS

In honor of the 100th Anniversary, Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee, in partnership with **Harry Caray's Restaurant Group**, will collect ornaments to decorate the trees. Anyone wishing to donate an ornament can drop it off at Harry Caray's Tavern on Navy Pier or at Harry Caray's Italian Steakhouse in River North, Lombard or Rosemont between now and Nov., 30.

Harry Caray's Navy Pier will also be commemorating the anniversary with display of original 1912 Chicago newspapers detailing the story of the Christmas tree ship tradition and the sinking of the *Rouse Simmons*. Guests attending the Opening Ceremony on December 1 at Navy Pier are invited to stop in at Harry's to view the newspapers.

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ABOUT CHICAGO'S CHRISTMAS SHIP COMMITTEE

The trees were purchased with money raised by the "Chicago's Christmas Ship" Committee. This committee is comprised of and supported by all facets of the Chicago's boating community, including the International Shipmasters' Association, Chicago Marine Heritage Society, US Navy League, Chicago yacht clubs, Friends of the Marine Community, Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Chicago Yachting Association.

The trees will be taken off the Mackinaw by local youth volunteers, the Sea Cadets, Venture Crews, Sea Explorer Scouts and the Young Marines and loaded onto trucks for distribution to more than a thousand deserving families throughout Chicago by Ada S. McKinley Community Services. More than 300 children from the Chicago area will learn about the role of the Coast Guard, the "Christmas Tree Ship" tradition, observe a Sea Partners ecology presentation and experience a ship tour by Coast Guard Auxiliary. Members of the Mackinaw's crew and volunteers from Chicago's boating community will decorate the ship for the "Chicago's Christmas Ship" tree event.

ABOUT THE MACKINAW

Chicago's boating community reenactment of the olden days of the *Rouse Simmons* landing in Chicago is now portrayed by the Mackinaw. The Mackinaw replaced the original ice breaker, which served the Great Lakes since 1944, and was donated for use as a maritime museum located in Mackinaw City, Mich. This ship, which is home to a crew of 60, was built in Marinette, Wisconsin and commissioned in June 2006. It is one of the Coast Guard's most technologically advanced multi-missioned cutters. In addition to its primary ice breaking and aids-to-navigation missions, the Mackinaw also performs search and rescue and maritime law enforcement.

The Mackinaw's arrival is a culmination of efforts by the Chicago's Christmas Ship Committee, working together with the Coast Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary, the Sea Partners Program, Chicago Navy Pier, private individuals, and the hard working generous boaters of the marine community to help make Christmas special for deserving Chicago families.