

Volunteering on the Skipjack Nathan of Dorchester

Who we are

The Skipjack *Nathan of Dorchester* is owned and operated by the Dorchester Skipjack Committee, a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization. The Committee is composed entirely of volunteers who serve in all administrative, crew and maintenance functions.

Our mission is: to own, preserve, and operate the Chesapeake Bay Skipjack Nathan of Dorchester to promote and share the rich maritime heritage of the Eastern Shore by offering educational on-the-water experiences on an authentic Chesapeake Bay sailing vessel.

Nathan sails from Cambridge and occasionally from other ports on the Chesapeake Bay. We are underway 80 to 100 times a year, we provide sail training opportunities for new and returning crew and we carry over 1,000 passengers annually. Revenue from carrying passengers is used to preserve, maintain and operate the boat.

The Dorchester Skipjack Committee meets at 5:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month at the Dorchester County Airport. All volunteers, crew, docents and trainees are welcome to attend our organizational meetings. Officers and Directors are elected each year at the Annual Meeting in November.

How we communicate with our volunteers

We rely on e-mail to keep volunteers informed of upcoming and ever changing sailing opportunities. We urge all of our volunteers to visit our web site frequently. During the season we frequently send out e-news letters to our volunteers. The Nathan website, www.skipjack-nathan.org is the home of the latest information for volunteers including links to the schedule, information on upcoming activities, and a list of open positions for sail crew and docents to be filled for upcoming charters and public sails. We use a program called *SignUpGenius* to sign up for training or for our captains, qualified crew and docents to sign up for public sails and charters. With our busy sailing schedule, there are ample opportunities for everyone to be on the boat. It is only through active participation, that our volunteers help us meet the goal to have a captain, four trained crew members and a docent on board for each passenger carrying trip.

Sailing on Nathan

Sailing on the Nathan is a very physical experience and each new sail or docent crew volunteer is required to submit a signed Initial Fitness Form, attesting that they have no physical conditions that may prevent them or put them at risk from performing the crew activities on a sailing vessel. We also require a completed Volunteer Application so we can add contact and emergency information to our data base.

All volunteers are accepted on a provisional basis with full sail crew or full docent status being granted to those volunteers who have met all training standards and requirements of the organization.

Every volunteer brings his or her own strengths and weaknesses on board with them. We all learn to sail *the Nathan way*. Some new crew trainees may need more time working with experienced crew, so the crew complement may be adjusted to balance crew experience for the safety of passengers and the boat. Even if a trip appears to have a full crew, volunteer trainees are encouraged to sign up for the experience of sailing with passengers. We make every effort to give all of our trainees the time on the boat that they need to become fully proficient.

One of the last steps in qualifying as a full sail crew member is to have a physician certify their fitness for duty. Sail crew members are required to have subsequent medical recertification every 3 years or after serious illness or injury. Docents are not required to meet this level of medical recertification.

The Nathan of Dorchester is a commercial sailing vessel and the Coast Guard requires random drug testing of all captains and sail crew. Each prospective sail crew trainee is required to pass an initial drug test with the cost reimbursed when the trainee has attained full crew member status and has volunteered for three crew assignments. Subsequent random drug tests are conducted at Committee expense.

What we expect from our Volunteers

Our volunteers pay no dues and are not required to sign up for a specific number of trips each season; however we depend on each volunteer to participate as often as possible to help us meet our busy schedule. Experienced crew and docents help with new crew training and are expected to take part of as many public sails or charters as their personal schedules allow each month. We always need volunteers that are willing to serve at short notice when necessary.

Although we have trained docents on board passenger trips, every volunteer must be familiar with the boat, Skipjack history and oyster harvesting traditions so they can answer the basic questions of passengers and the general public.

Our sail crew and docents are the most visible representatives of the organization and we expect everyone to interact with the passengers and public in a friendly, courteous and knowledgeable, professional manner. We are a U.S. Coast Guard inspected and registered commercial sailing vessel and we operate to the highest standards of safety, professionalism and maintenance. As a mark of proficiency and competency, our sail crew members wear red shirts and our docents wear yellow shirts.

An extensive set of resource materials and training experiences are available at no cost for all sail crew and docent trainee volunteers. Training starts in the classroom and moves dockside and on the boat as the weather improves. Sail crew members are trained in all aspects of boat maintenance, helmsmanship, seamanship and emergency procedures. They learn to work as a team with our experienced sail crew members. Our docent volunteers receive training on the lore and maritime history of the Eastern Shore and handling passengers, but Docents are not required to be trained as sail crew.

Voyages and Adventures

From time to time, *Nathan* travels to other ports on the Chesapeake Bay in her capacity as the Cambridge and Dorchester County sailing ambassador. These long-distance trips are excellent opportunities for crew and trainees to get extensive experience at operating the boat under a variety of conditions, including an occasional night transit. Crew members and trainees can experience shifts on the helm under different weather conditions, and get a good feel for how the boat handles as we sail up and down the Chesapeake Bay.

When we visit distant ports, the crew usually sleeps on deck. We rig a canvas tarp which provides some protection from the elements. We bring our sleeping bags, changes of clothes and come prepared for rain, wind, heat, cold, insects, and all conditions depending on the weather and port of call. During transits, crew and other volunteers bring their own food.

Volunteers who maintain Nathan and book passengers

Maintenance on the *Nathan* and her push-boat is a year-round effort and we welcome all kinds of volunteer skills to help. There is always some work that needs to be done, enough to enlist the talents and abilities of everyone. Our maintenance team plans, organizes, and schedules maintenance tasks. In the spring, as soon as the weather cooperates, sanding and painting of the deck and cabins take place, the sails and push-boat are put back on and all volunteers help to re-rig the boat and get it ready for the new season.

In August, *Nathan* is hauled out of the water and we all help with sanding, painting and incidental hull maintenance as well as participating in our yearly U.S. Coast Guard inspection. In October we have our on-the-water Coast Guard inspection and in November, we all join in to prepare the boat for the winter.

To run a successful operation, it takes a small group of very important and dedicated volunteers to book passengers, schedule charters and handle all of our marketing and administrative tasks. Dockside and on shore help are an essential part of our organizational success. We rely on volunteers to help with the many administrative tasks and details that are essential to our continued success. Whatever your interests may be, there is a place for you in our organization.