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El Faro Salute memorial dedicated in Maine

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The El Faro Salute monument pays tribute to the 33 crewmembers who lost their lives in Hurricane Joaquin on Oct. 1, 2015. It was dedicated Sept. 24 in Rockland, Maine. Photo by Robin Coles

The *El Faro* Salute pays tribute to the 33 crewmembers who lost their lives in Hurricane Joaquin on Oct. 1, 2015.

“It’s a source of comfort for the families,” said Maine artist and sculptor Jay “J-Bone” Sawyer, who created the monument dedicated Sept. 24 in Rockland, Maine. “A symbol to increase awareness for the maritime industry, and those that make the sacrifices daily.”

Love was in the air during the dedication attended by families of the lost crewmembers, friends and observers and tears flowed freely.

Prior to the ceremony family and friends gathered in front of the memorial hugging people with familiar faces. Others looked for their loved ones name etched in the flat steel, then rubbed an impression with paper and crayon. They sat in front of the memorial holding each other’s hands while clutching a single red rose.

Patricia Quammie of Jacksonville, Fla., lost her husband, Theodore Quammie. He was a merchant marine for 37 years, the *El Faro*’s chief steward, and the oldest one on the ship.

“Everyone has my deepest sympathy and condolences,” said Quammie. “I pray that we stay united forever, like our 33 precious loved ones who will stay together forever. For those going out on the ships now and their families, if you see something is wrong, don’t be afraid to speak up. Don’t be afraid to challenge the system. Make sure if you’re supposed to have your safety equipment, you know the location, you know where it’s at. Make sure you just take all the necessary safety precautions.”

The ceremony opened with the Bay Winds North Wind Ensemble playing the Star Spangled Banner. Then, both the Maine Maritime Academy and Massachusetts Maritime Academy color guards marched the colors front and center.

Sawyer welcomed the more than 300 family members and guests.

“Public art is powerful,” said Sawyer. “And putting it here in Rockland for the dedication of the *El Faro* Salute proves that. It now belongs to both Rockland and the maritime community.”

El Faro translates as “the lighthouse.” If you look through the port holes, you’ll see Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse in Penobscot Bay. Beyond that, merchant mariners will continue to sail by.

A week before the dedication the sculpture was still white metal. Tim Matheson, a Maine Maritime Academy graduate, sandblasted it with salt water to start the rusting process. Since then, the color has transformed, and it’s not done changing. The bottom is core 10 steel. Shipmate Ray Moody, who now teaches at Maine Maritime, modeled the male uniform. Classmate Maggie Letarte modeled the woman’s jacket.

According to Letarte, the woman’s jacket fits tight and lifts when saluting because of the shoulder pads. Both uniforms are eight-inch mild steel. Sawyer’s daughter modeled the female hand.

A bell was rung for each crewmember after Capt. Andrew Triandafilou from the Boston Marine Society read their names.

A family member of crewmember Danielle Randolph said the ceremony was a good dedication and tribute. Many stated they were glad to have a memorial in Rockland, and planned to return on Oct. 1 for the seventh anniversary.

The memorial lists the 33 *El Faro* crewmembers in alphabetical order by first name:

Andrzej Truskowski, Anthony Thomas, Brookie Davis, Carey Hatch, Danielle Randolph, Dylan Meklin, Frank Hamm, German Solar-Cortes, Howard Schoenly, Jack Jackson, Jackie Jones jr, James Porter, Jan Podgorski, Jeffrey Mathias, Jeremie Riehm, Joe Hargrove, Keith Griffin, Lashawn Rivera, Lonnie Jordan, Louis Champa, Marcin Nita, Mariette Wright, Michael Davidson, Michael Holland, Mitchell Kuflik, Piotr Krause, Rafal Zdobych, Richard Pusatere, Roan Lightfoot, Roosevelt Clark, Steven Shultz, Sylvester Crawford Jr., and Theodore Quammie.