



## The Professional Captain: Cruising Chronicles of Captain Don Fleming

Captain Don Fleming is well known on the Hudson River and the Sound for his on-board training in docking, maneuvering, navigation, and electronics. He holds a USCG Master of Oceans license for power and sail up to 100 tons and has over thirty years experience as a professional captain and as an educator. He is available for private onboard instruction. For additional information visit [www.captaindonfleming.com](http://www.captaindonfleming.com) or call 914-941-3998.

*Photos courtesy Seamen's Church Institute*

# The Seamen's Church Institute: a Guiding Light for Mariners

It was license renewal time again, and I was headed down the Harlem River at 6:00 a.m. on a dark winter morning, having shoved off from home an hour before. Rather than navigating that familiar waterway by boat, I was negotiating the Harlem River Drive by car. Upon the advice of Ed Shultz, Mariner Licensing Counselor and Lecturer at the Seamen's Church Institute, with whom I had an early morning meeting, my pre-dawn departure was the best way to beat the rush hour traffic. It was going to be a long day.

I would meet with Ed, who would review my paper work, then head down to the United States Coast

*The Rev. Jim Wilkinson, Chaplain for SCI's Ministry on the River, has been visiting towboats along 2,200 miles of America's inland waterways since this unique program began in 1998.*



Guard Headquarters at The Battery to submit the renewal documents for my Master of Oceans License, my Merchant Mariner's Document (MMD Card) and my Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers Certificate (STCW-95 Card), then jump next door to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal to apply for the new Homeland Security "Transportation Workers Identity Card" know as "TWIC", and finally return to Ed for a late lunch. A one stop shopping tour.

I was appropriately steeped in history: the Seamen's Church Institute nestled between the magnificent Brooklyn Bridge and the restorations at South Street Seaport, the memorials of the once strategic Battery, and the canyons of Wall Street, all within easy walking distance. And what a pleasant walk it was as the morning progressed into one of those incredible spring-like winter days with temperatures in the sixties, bright sun, and gusty winds. I took a break between appointments, wandered around the many statues and monuments in Battery Park, and sat on a bench with a coffee looking out at the Statue of Liberty, the ship traffic in the busy Upper Bay, and the Verrazano Bridge in the distance. Truly a renewing environment.

With the USCG License renewal procedures becoming more complex, costly and time consuming every year, especially since 9/11, I felt fortunate to have the services of

Ed Shultz and The Seamen's Church Institute at my disposal. Ed had contacted me over a year ago to remind me that my license would be up for renewal and to offer his services. Being well aware of the deadline, I had already started taking courses at the Maritime College of the State University of New York at Fort Schuyler and knew I would accumulate a half inch thick file of documents before I was through. (See my article "Training with the Pros" May 2007, @ either [www.captaindonfleming.com](http://www.captaindonfleming.com) or [www.boatingonthehudson.com](http://www.boatingonthehudson.com) for more details on the

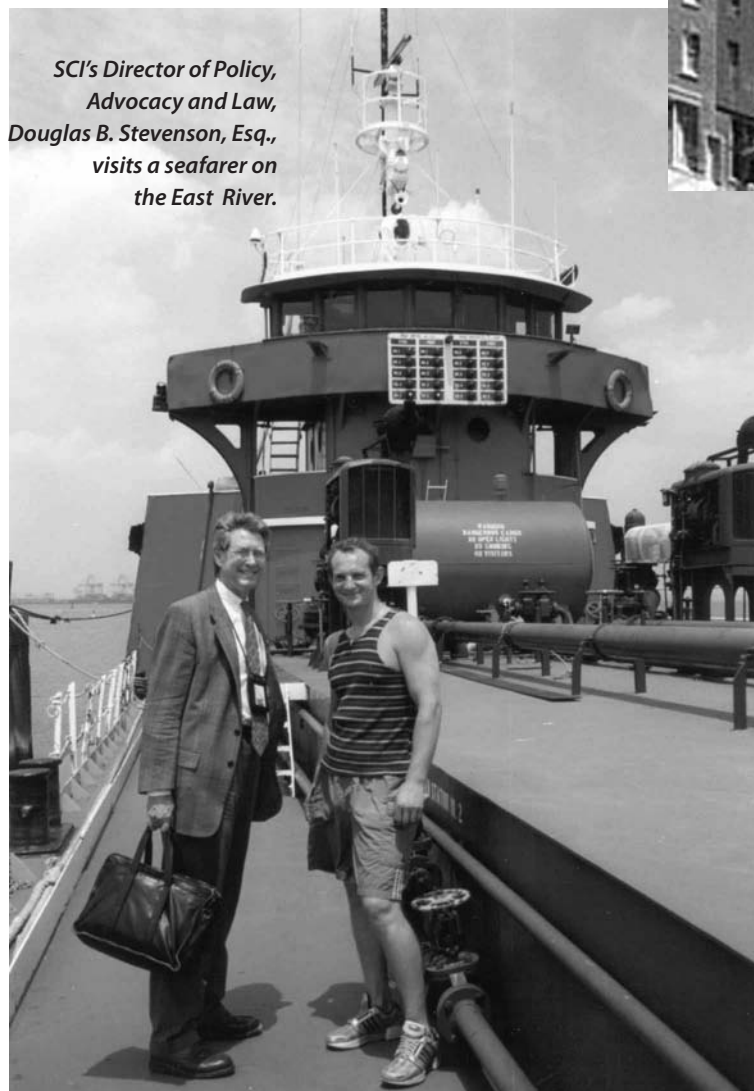
Maritime College and Fort Schuyler.) Ed reviewed my strategy and updated me on new procedures. We made the plan to meet back then.

## The Seamen's Church Institute Mission

In a building designed to look like a ship, located near the confluence of the Hudson and East Rivers in historic South Street Seaport, The Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) is an organization worth of note to every boater and lover of the sea. It's a jewel in the crown of our nation's maritime heritage, an unsung heroic crusader, and a vital beacon in the modern seafaring world.

With a long and distinguished history of providing aid to merchant mariners from all over the world, the SCI offers an array of services at its many centers around the country ranging from state of the art professional marine training to comfort and recreation centers to social, legal, and spiritual counseling.

The Seamen's Church Institute was founded in 1834 to protect seafarers from the abuses of the sometime ruthless shipping industry. This early era of nonexistent or weak civil rights laws, characterized by greed, often led to the exploita-



*SCI's Director of Policy, Advocacy and Law, Douglas B. Stevenson, Esq., visits a seafarer on the East River.*

tion of workers, with especially harsh conditions for mariners. Today, the SCI is the largest and most comprehensive mariners' agency in North America.

Its maritime education curricula provide navigational training to nearly 1,600 mariners each year through simulator-based facilities in Houston, Texas and Paducah, Kentucky. Its chaplains visit 3,400 vessels in the Port of New York and New Jersey and along 2,200 miles of America's inland waterways. Its maritime attorneys are recognized as leading advocates for merchant mariners by the United States Congress, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Department of Homeland Security, as well as the United Nations, the International Maritime Organization, the International Labor Organization, and major maritime trade associations.

## The History of Maritime Training at SCI

In 1899, noting that seafarers stayed in the New York seaport area to look for work on another ship, and realizing that advanced skills would assist them in finding jobs, the Seamen's Church Institute started an informal training center.

In 1916, World War I created an unprecedented demand for mariners and the SCI responded by training some 15,000 seamen. Again during WWII the SCI met the crucial challenge by training more

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than 25,000 mariners. After the war, with larger vessels manned by smaller crews, staying in port for shorter durations in fewer locations, new challenges arose as the merchant fleet began to contract.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's with the development of computerized training simulators, the potential for research and training to supplement an industry that had relied solely on classroom and on-the-job training for thousands of years was realized. The Seamen's Church Institute was at the forefront of this technological sea change. Although fewer mariners were being trained, the level of training required was increasing exponentially in difficulty and volume. I can well remember being dazzled and amazed by the realism and accuracy of the SCI simulator as I participated for the first time in ship handling and advanced RADAR simulator courses in 1991, as part of my upgrade to Master of Oceans.

In more recent times, with the size of the deep-sea merchant fleet continuing to shrink, SCI began to look at other possibilities; and the need to train tug and barge crews on inland waters and our nation's larger rivers soon became apparent. In 1997, in answer to the new demand, the Seamen's Church Institute-Paducah Center opened in Kentucky specializing in skill training on the Western Rivers with the first dedicated river vessel simulator in America. In 2001, The Seamen's Church Institute-Houston Center followed with another state of the art simulator dedicated to inland, coastal and deep-sea skills. These two modern centers span the full range of high tech maritime training.

*Seamen's Church Institute - Port Newark Center welcomes over 57,000 seafarers, port workers, and truckers in a safe, friendly environment for relaxation, recreation, and spiritual refreshment.*



The curricula cover an array of dynamic courses from Advanced Pilothouse Management to Fire Fighting to Team Building to River Hydrodynamics. The list seems unending, and to access the entire spectrum, you can visit [www.seamen-church.org](http://www.seamen-church.org).

### SCI Law and Advocacy

From its offices in New York's South Street Seaport, the Seamen's Church Institute's Policy, Advocacy, and Law program which includes the Center for Seafarers' Rights upholds the Institutes historic mission. SCI's lawyers provide research, legal assistance, and training on issues relating to seafarer exploitation ranging from bad ship-board food to denial of shore leave to preparing a petition to the International Court of Justice to free a ship's crew held hostage for over two years.

The Institute's attorneys also work to improve national and international law and practices to protect mariners and to upgrade maritime safety and security in areas relating to stowaways, piracy, repatriation, medical care, and shore leave.

The SCI's Policy, Advocacy, and Lawyer staff also collaborates with the maritime industry to share its concern for problems caused by sub-standard ships. Through contributions from

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*SCI chaplain, the Rev. James Kollin, (at right) greets a seafarer onboard a container ship in Port Newark NJ where SCI chaplains visit 90% of all vessels arriving to the Port of New York & New Jersey.*

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individuals, corporations and organizations it provides pro-bono legal assistance to exploited seafarers worldwide, presents worthwhile programs for the maritime industry, and advocates to upgrade the level of ship operations.

### Social Responsibility at SCI

Through the SCI's Passenger Ship Terminal Hospitality Centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn pastoral care and business services such as wire transfers, calling cards, internet access, and cell phones are provided to crew members whenever a cruise ship arrives. SCI's Seafarers' Center located in Port Newark serves the largest port complex on the East Coast in a similar manner seven days a week. It offers a welcome, friendly and safe environment for relaxation, recreation, and spiritual refreshment to seafarers and port workers including truck drivers, stevedores, and warehouse workers. SCI's Ministry on the River provides the nation's only full-time pastoral care network for Mississippi and Ohio River workers and their families from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, as well as the Gulf Coast.

### A Call To Action

What can we do? Just being aware of a worthwhile organization like The Seamen's Church Institute is a step in the right direction. We are, after all, very fortunate custodians of the Hudson and the surrounding waters. We who love and enjoy the river and sea also have an obligation to raise everyone's awareness of organizations like SCI that are committed to help those who serve it. It is great to ride around

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*Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao tests a navigation simulation at Seamen's Church Institute's Paducah Center on Oct. 3, 2007. SCI's Executive Director, the Rev. David M. Rider, is at the far right.*

enjoying the Hudson or Sound on a beautiful day, but there is more to it than that. A worthy organization like the SCI is part of our heritage, part of our soul, and its unique role is made possible only through the support of its donors.

Besides reaching for our check books, opportunities exist for volunteering for ship visiting and helping with Christmas programs. The Christmas at Sea program, begun during the Spanish American War, continues today because 4,500 knitters representing every state send in over 17,000 handmade Christmas gifts every year.

For further information on how you can help contact The Seamen's Church Institute of New York & New Jersey, at 241 Water Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10038, or call 212-349-9090 or visit [www.seamenschurch.org](http://www.seamenschurch.org).

"Quick's the word and sharp's the action." See you next time from wherever the winds blow us.

*The above comments are general suggestions. They are not intended to be used for navigational purposes. Individual captains are ultimately responsible for setting proper courses and safely navigating their vessels by relying on their own knowledge, judgment and experience to determine the correct action in any given situation.*

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