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SAIL250® VIRGINIA LAUNCHES "DISCOVERY DECK" INTERACTIVE EDUCATION CENTER JUNE 19-21, 2026

Family-friendly attraction under Nauticus pavilion; hands-on exhibits, live demonstrations, maritime history, STEM activities, wildlife encounters, and Juneteenth programming

NORFOLK, Va. (May 29, 2026) — Families, students, educators, and lifelong learners visiting Sail250® Virginia next June will have the opportunity to explore Virginia's maritime heritage and future through the new **"Discovery Deck,"** an interactive education center located at the outdoor pavilion behind Nauticus in downtown Norfolk.

Open June 19–21, 2026, from noon to 7 p.m. daily, the Discovery Deck will serve as Sail250® Virginia's official family and educational programming hub, featuring hands-on exhibits, live demonstrations, cultural programming, career exploration activities, and interactive experiences designed to engage visitors of all ages.

The attraction is designed especially for families attending the festival, educational travelers, homeschool groups, and students participating in Sail250® Virginia's statewide educational initiatives. Exhibitors will include museums, science organizations, public media, environmental groups, cultural organizations, youth programs, and maritime educators from across Hampton Roads and Virginia.

"Our goal is to make Sail250® Virginia not only a spectacular event on the waterfront, but also an immersive learning experience for families and visitors of all ages," said Paula Barclay Cook, Sail250® Virginia education manager. "The Discovery Deck brings together maritime history, science, culture, environmental stewardship, and hands-on creativity in one place where visitors can explore Virginia's connections to the world — past, present, and future."

<u>Highlights of the Discovery Deck include:</u>

- **Interactive marine science activities** from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and the Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences, including a simulated shark-tagging experience based on Virginia shark research.

- **STEM and coding activities** from Code Ninjas, including Lego shipbuilding, ship-themed video games, and 3D-printed ship giveaways.
- **Historic and cultural exhibits and activities** from organizations including Discovering Amistad, the Library of Virginia, and the Norfolk Historical Society.
- **Environmental and wildlife programming** from the Elizabeth River Project Barge-On-Wheels, the Elizabeth River Trail, and the Virginia Zoo featuring live river creatures, conservation education, and hands-on discovery activities.
- **Art, music, and cultural experiences** from the Chrysler Museum of Art, Music Theory Studios, and the Tidewater African Cultural Alliance, the Tidewater Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, and WHRO Public Media.
- **Maritime and naval heritage activities** from Nauticus
- **Adopt-A-Ship showcase** displaying examples from Sail250® Virginia's statewide education program, which connects Virginia classrooms and community organizations with crews aboard visiting international vessels before they arrive in Virginia.
- **HISTORY ALIVE!** Strolling throughout the event, costumed interpreters provide engaging, first-person perspectives that illuminate the struggles, achievements, and enduring legacy of those who helped shape our nation.

The Discovery Deck programming also coincides with the Juneteenth National Holiday and Norfolk Harborfest's 50th anniversary weekend celebrations during Sail250® Virginia, offering additional opportunities for visitors to engage with exhibits and performances exploring African American history, culture, resilience, and maritime connections.

Volunteers are still needed to serve with the Discovery Deck, June 19-21, as **Education Center Assistants** (to greet guests, assist with activities and entertainment), as well as **Escorts for Costumed Characters** (to escort and assist living history interpreters as they perform in various locations throughout the festival area). Anyone interested should complete and submit a "Volunteer Interest Form" which can be found on the Sail250® Virginia website, https://sail250virginia.com/volunteers.

Additional information about Sail250® Virginia educational programming can be found at Sail250 Virginia Education.

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About Sail250® Virginia

Sail250® Virginia, hosted by the City of Norfolk, is part of the United States' national commemoration of America's 250th anniversary. This signature event is planned as the largest public event in the Commonwealth for the 250th. Scheduled June 12- 23, 2026, the event will bring a fleet of international tall ships, military ships, historic and character vessels to Norfolk (June 19 – 22, 2026) and Affiliate Harbors (June 12 – 21, 2026) in the Chesapeake Bay Region for multi-day waterfront festivals, featuring ship tours, fireworks, concerts, and educational programming. Sail250® Virginia will showcase Virginia's role as a maritime gateway to the world, bringing together participants and visitors from around the globe.

For more details, visit www.sail250virginia.com, Facebook, and Instagram