



# TOWN-N-GOWN | JUNE NEWSLETTER – 2026

## TOWN-N-GOWN LEADERSHIP

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Justin Mason ~ Evelyn Robinson

Wilma Robinson ~ Helmut Speckheuer

*University Liason*

Veleka Gatling, PhD.

AVO, Community Engagement

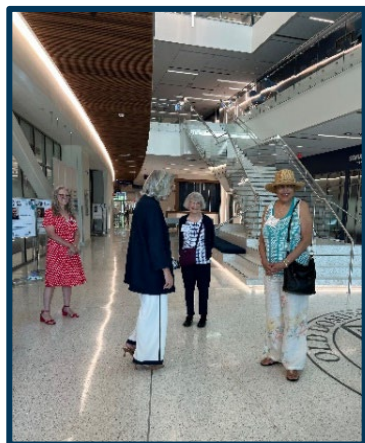
## UPCOMING EVENTS / DATES TO

### REMEMBER

- June 2, 9:30 am – Board meeting at Global Freindship House. *Guest speaker:* Elaine Roriquuez at 11:00am
- June 12-23 – Sail250®
- June 19-21 – Norfolk Harborfest 50
- Fridays in June – Friday Night Family Flix at the Portsmouth Pavilion
- Wednesday Nights – Planetarium shows at the Lê Planetarium
- September 8, 9:30 am – Board meeting at Webb Center or join by Zoom

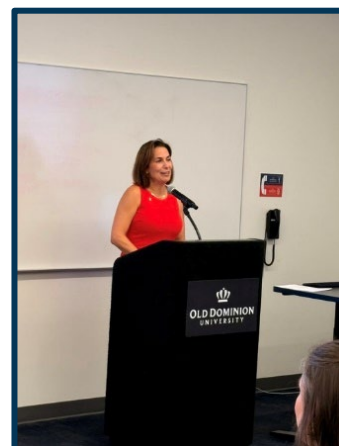
# TOWN-N-GOWN ANNUAL MEETING

The 61st annual dinner meeting took place at the *Ellmer Health Sciences* building on 41st Street at Monarch Way... and we missed many of you in attendance. Each year in May, is the Annual Dinner meeting with a Military speaker. Last year, at our 60<sup>th</sup>, Captain Matt Schlarmann spoke as the Commanding Officer of Naval Station Norfolk. At his Change of Command/Retirement in February, I met his colleague and friend of 20+ years, Captain Marc Hines. His wife, Daniela, joined the event and we discussed our roles in TNG and Blue Star Families and developing community.



Prior to this year's dinner meeting, Dean of the Ellmer College of Health Science, Dr. Bonnie Van Lunen, gave a tour of two floors of the building. Members and guests were surprised to see the front end of a city bus and "Taxi cab" (Physical Therapy enables endurance and safe climbing), full scale one bedroom apartment (Occupational Therapy - teaching disability accessibility), cadaver lab for Anatomy classes, Kinesiology equipment to measure gait, balance, strength, etc. and a 40+ seat dental hygiene classroom ready for customers, helping students with practicum work. Please consider joining ODU students and professors by participating in their coursework at the Ellmer Health Sciences building - "it's beautiful and well organized too."

Our guest speaker, Daniela Hines, Sr. Manager of Events (national level), spoke of the BLUE STAR Families organization, which launched its 14<sup>th</sup> chapter in Hampton Roads on April 24<sup>th</sup>. Her husband, Captain Marc Hines, attended and encouraged our community to attend the exciting *SAIL250* 10-day event, including the 50th anniversary of *Harborfest*. Paula Moran, the Hampton Roads Director of BSF also attended, agrees that TNG (*N* = National Defense Forces) and BSF have a reciprocal desire to create community. Hampton Roads has 300,000 military personnel from 8 branches at 15 bases (most have someone living on their block or neighborhood). The goal is building a community with local residents & businesses to welcome and encourage the families' involvement in non-military groups, events and activities, especially during deployment, and supporting the families. As ODU has nearly 30% military affiliated students: active duty, reserve or veterans, TNG has a goal to enhance their connections. Visit [www.Bluestarfam.org](http://www.Bluestarfam.org) for more information.



Each spring, Town-N-Gown awards funds go to deserving organizations or projects affiliated with the University. Any school, college, department, or organizational unit, including student organizations, activities, and sports teams, affiliated with or sponsored by Old Dominion University is eligible to submit a grant request. Evaluating each grant request includes many tangible and intangible factors including



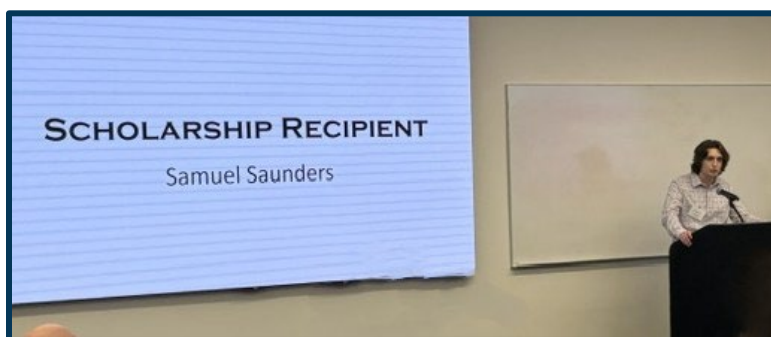
merit of project, potential influence on the quality of life for ODU students, faculty, and staff, number of requests. Grant requests may be submitted for any amount up to \$4,000.

In 2026, the awards were given to four incredible groups: The ODU Alumni Association, The Barry Arts Museum, The Ellmer School of Nursing and ODU's Environmental Health and Safety.

*ODU Alumni Association*  
*Barry Arts Museum*  
*Ellmer School of Nursing*  
*Environmental Health and Safety*

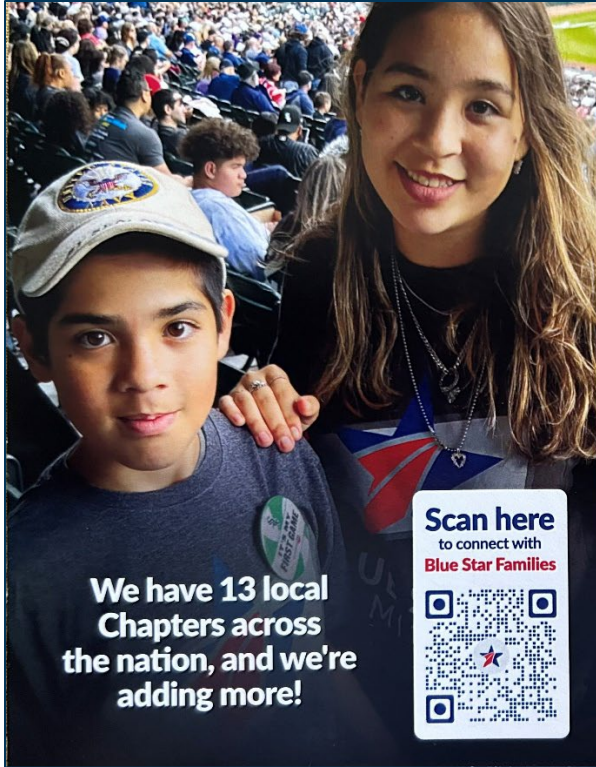


Samuel Saunders, a resident of Virginia Beach and now a senior at Old Dominion University, received the 2025-26 Town-N-Gown Scholarship. As Sam was our guest at the annual dinner meeting, he said he was quite surprised to learn so much of TNG, enjoy an elegant meal and especially a chance in meeting the members. He is so grateful to receive the timely scholarship as he pursues Creative Writing coursework for his BA degree. The TNG Endowed Scholarship, since 1986, is awarded annually to an undergraduate student on a rotational basis between a local resident or military student (or their dependent) or ODU Faculty/ Staff applicant (or dependent).



*ODU student Samuel Saunders is this years' Town-N-Gown Scholarship recipient*





**We have 13 local Chapters across the nation, and we're adding more!**



## Blue Star Families

**The families of our All-Volunteer Force make unprecedented sacrifices to serve our country.** Blue Star Families was founded by military spouses in 2009 to empower these families to thrive as they serve. We're committed to strengthening military families by connecting them with their neighbors – individuals and organizations – to create vibrant communities of mutual support. **We believe we're all stronger when we take care of one another.**

### Blue Star Welcome Programs

Blue Star Welcome Programs foster and create vibrant communities of support by welcoming new families into their communities and providing opportunities for all members to connect with each other and their civilian neighbors.

<p>Providing exclusive, easy-to-access deals and discounts to members from dozens of partners like Highlights, Spritune, T-Mobile, Headspace, Thrive Market, and more!</p>	<p><b>BLUE STAR MUSEUMS</b></p> <p>Offering free entry to 2,000+ museums nationwide annually to active-duty military personnel, including the National Guard and Reserves, and their families.</p>	<p>Connecting youth and families to community through literacy and fostering community connection, strength, and empathy through the power of reading.</p>
<p>Creating spaces of inclusion and support in local communities where families can access resources and forge relationships. Made possible through a national partnership with Starbucks.</p>	<p>Activating a fast-growing network of community-based changemakers to be the bridge between military and civilian communities.</p>	<p>Improving the sense of belonging through deeper community connectedness, providing opportunities for overall wellness, and creating stewards of our natural resources.</p>
<p>Brokering workforce development solutions to empower military spouses and their career journey by identifying resources that align with their military lifestyle.</p>	<p>Addressing and advocating for food insecurity concerns amongst military and Veteran communities with on-the-ground solutions.</p>	<p>Forging upstream solutions within peer-to-peer networks of support through the Caregiver and Combat the Silence program cohorts.</p>



[bluestarfam.org](http://bluestarfam.org)

# AROUND CAMPUS

## OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY AT 144TH COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES



More than 3,000 students joined the ranks of Monarch alumni, representing a global network of nearly 200,000 strong, during Old Dominion University's 144th Commencement Exercises the weekend of May 15-16.

Family members, loved ones and close friends cheered on their graduates at ceremonies across campus, recognizing the hard work and tremendous success achieved during their journeys at Old Dominion University.

More than 2,000 students gathered for the Main Undergraduate Ceremony at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 16, at S.B. Ballard Stadium. The event celebrated graduates of the Batten College of Engineering and Technology, the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies, Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences Ellmer College of Health Sciences at Old Dominion University, Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences Ellmer School of Nursing at Old Dominion University, the Strome College of Business, the College of Arts and Letters, the College of Sciences, the Joint School of Public Health at Old Dominion University, in partnership with Norfolk State University, the School of Cybersecurity and the School of Data Science.

"Commencement is a special time to celebrate the educational achievements and personal milestones of our newest Monarch alumni," said Old Dominion University President Brian O. Hemphill, Ph.D. "As we reflect on this special time in the life of the Class of 2026 and the storied history of Old Dominion University, we do so as a caring community with strong support for our campus, our community, our commonwealth and beyond."



Website:  
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During the ceremony, the University bestowed an Honorary Doctor of Business upon Bryan K. Stephens, president and CEO of the Hampton Roads Chamber and a U.S. Army veteran. Dr. Stephens served as the featured keynote speaker.

Highlighting that nearly 30% of the University student body is military-affiliated, Dr. Stephens shared how his own time in the service shaped a major turning point in his life. He admitted to the graduates that, early in his career, he was laser-focused on personal achievement, but found himself unfulfilled and achieving only mediocrity. Everything changed, he noted, when he experienced a profound paradigm shift and embraced a framework built on three simple words: grace, gratitude and giving.

Dr. Stephens challenged the Class of 2026 to rise above a world often filled with division and outrage by becoming people of grace. "Grace is developed in the small moments — how you treat the waiter, the cashier, your coworkers, your family and the people who can do nothing for you in return," Dr. Stephens said. "In its simplest form, grace is treating people the way you want to be treated."

He also urged the graduates to cultivate gratitude by shifting their focus toward their blessings and dedicating their lives to giving. "You cannot live a life of significance, while living only for yourself," he said. "You simply cannot be selfish and significant at the same time."

In closing, Dr. Stephens left the historic class with a final charge:

*"Live with grace — be someone people trust and respect. Live with gratitude — never lose sight of how blessed you are. Live with giving — pour into others and watch your life expand in ways you never imagined. If you do that, you won't just build a career. You will build a legacy."*

The University also bestowed a posthumous Honorary Doctor of Public Service to **Lt. Col. Brandon A. Shah** (B.S. '07) recognizing his distinguished service, leadership and lasting impact. His wife, Katherine Shah, received a standing ovation from a near capacity audience at S.B. Ballard Stadium as she accepted the honor on his behalf. The deeply moving moment exemplified the University's profound appreciation for Lt. Col. Shah's heroism and his legacy.

### **Undergraduate College and School Ceremonies**

Immediately following the Main Undergraduate Ceremony, the newly minted graduates participated in college and school ceremonies. At each ceremony, graduates crossed the stage and celebrated their individual achievements with their closest peers, faculty mentors, families and friends.

- S.B. Ballard Stadium was the campus location for the Strome College of Business, the College of Arts and Letters and the College of Sciences.
- Chartway Arena was the campus location for the Batten College of Engineering and Technology, the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies, the School of Cybersecurity and the School of Data Science.



- Kaufman Mall was the campus location for Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University's Ellmer College of Health Sciences, Ellmer School of Nursing and the Joint School of Public Health, in partnership with Norfolk State University.

### **Graduate Degree Celebrations**

Commencement weekend began Friday, May 15, highlighting medical degrees and advanced degrees at two separate celebrations.

### **Doctor of Medicine Ceremony**

141 medical students of Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences Eastern Virginia Medical School at Old Dominion University took center stage as graduates at 3 p.m. on Friday, May 15, in Chartway Arena. This ceremony honored the Doctor of Medicine candidates, with Michael Joseph Bono, MD (MD '83, Emergency Medicine Residency '86), serving as the main speaker. Dr. Bono distilled advice to the new physicians reflecting upon his own distinguished 39-year career in emergency medicine.

"Medicine is tough sometimes," said Dr. Bono explaining the long hours, challenging cases and difficult demands of being a physician. "Do your best all the time. Do the right thing medically, even when you don't want to."

Fourteen medical students participated in a "family hooding" during the ceremony. A long-standing medical school tradition, family members with ties to EVMS were invited to hood graduates on stage – a symbolic gesture marking the transition from medical school to professional practice, while honoring the legacy of healthcare professionals who came before them.

Dr. Bono closed his remarks by encouraging graduates to remember the people who helped them reach the milestone. "Do not forget those who helped you get to this day," he said. "Thank them. Hug them. Tell them how much they mean to you."

### **Advanced Degree Ceremony**

On Friday, May 15, at 6 p.m., commencement festivities were held at Chartway Arena with the Advanced Degree Ceremony, where more than 900 students celebrated earning their education specialist, master's and doctoral degrees. The ceremony included graduate students from all colleges and schools, including Macon & Joan Brock Virginia Health Sciences EVMS School of Health Professions at Old Dominion University.

The near capacity arena was filled with cheering families and friends as graduates proudly crossed the stage celebrating their educational achievements.

Bruce L. Rubin, Ph.D., associate professor and chair of Strome College of Business's Department of Finance, addressed the Class of 2026. Dr. Rubin referenced the 1964 Bob Dylan song "The Times They Are A-Changin'" to illustrate the shift to artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact.

"We are in the midst of profound socioeconomic change," he said. "The world is shifting. Technologies that seemed like science fiction two years ago are now being integrated into our daily lives."



Dr. Rubin then reflected on the changes over his parents' lifetime and his own, before exploring what the future might look like for the graduates in their lifetime. He gave them three takeaways to consider for a world with artificial intelligence (AI). First, he told them to learn the tools, but don't trust them blindly. Second, he urged them to protect their ability to think. Finally, he reminded them to "remember the human consequences."

"AI can generate answers. But, it cannot decide which answers matter. That responsibility still belongs to you," Dr. Rubin told the graduates calling them to use their education at a higher level. "Your value was never just in producing answers. Your value is in evaluating them. As you go forward, make sure the future we build is not just intelligent, but wise."

As the weekend celebrations concluded across campus, graduates left surrounded by cheers and hugs, beginning the next chapter of their journeys as Monarch alumni.

"I wish each and every one of you best wishes for a prosperous and successful life," said President Hemphill.

Article By [Jonah Grinkewitz](#), [Virginia Hilton](#) and [Robyn Sidersky](#)



## CLASS OF 2026: TRYING ONE CLASS LED TO AN UNPLANNED ARMY CAREER

Katherine Proffitt didn't set out to join the Army. In fact, when the Williamsburg native arrived at Old Dominion University, she was focused on finding her path — not leading troops overseas.

"I signed up for an introductory military science course with the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) just to try something new," she said. "I never imagined it would turn into a career. But, once I started, I kept going." That decision would shape the next four years of her studies and life.



Now, graduating from the University with a bachelor's in international studies and a minor in Japanese, Katherine is preparing to commission as a field artillery officer in the U.S. Army. In the months ahead, she will complete the Basic Officer Leadership Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, before heading to South Korea, where she will lead a platoon of approximately 40 soldiers and assist with operations in her unit.

*"I'll be responsible for leading troops and coordinating fire support," Katherine said. "It's an incredible opportunity, one that you simply can't replicate in the civilian world."*

Her role will include working with rocket and missile artillery and coordinating the employment of field artillery soldiers to ensure precision in high-stakes environments. While the responsibility is significant, Katherine is ready, even as she acknowledges the uncertainty that comes with it.

“The unknown is probably what makes me the most nervous,” she said. “You don’t always know what you don’t know. But, I trust my training and the lessons I’ve learned through ROTC.”

That training began in a program she quickly came to rely on, not just for leadership development, but for community. “I had an incredibly positive experience in ROTC at ODU,” she said. “The cadre, my mentors and my peers pushed me to grow and supported me every step of the way.”

*“It’s an incredible opportunity, one that you simply can’t replicate in the civilian world.”*

Katherine’s parents recommended the program to her, but it was her own experience that solidified her commitment. “They were supportive, but this became my decision,” she said. “ROTC challenged me in ways I didn’t expect and showed me what I’m capable of.” Those challenges were both physical and mental.

“There were mornings when the last thing I wanted to do was get up for a 12-mile ruck march with a 35-pound pack,” she said. “But those experiences taught me resilience. I learned that I can do hard things.”

Katherine’s growth as a leader became especially evident in her role as a senior cadet mentor, guiding younger students as they prepared for the demands of the program.

A few of the junior cadets had expressed their worries about the Army Fitness Test. I helped train them through running, weightlifting, and my own tips and tricks I’ve learned along the way. Every time one of my mentees comes up to me and says that they achieved a new personal best, it always makes me proud. That’s what leadership is about.”

That commitment to mentorship reflects a broader culture within the University’s ROTC program, where leadership is learned through experience and responsibility. For Katherine, one of the most meaningful moments of that responsibility came during her senior year, when she was entrusted with leading the University’s cannon crew — a group of cadets responsible for firing “Big Blue” at football games and campus events.

“It meant a lot to me that **Lt. Col. Brandon A. Shah (’07)** trusted me with that role,” she said. “That cannon is such a visible part of campus tradition, and being put in charge of it was a huge honor.”

Lt. Col. Shah, the beloved former Commander of the Army ROTC Monarch Battalion, had worked diligently to acquire the cannon in 2025. Today, the booming sound of the cannon has become a recognizable part of the University game-day experience, and a symbol of the ROTC program’s presence across campus.

*“It’s more than just a tradition,” Katherine said. “It shows that ROTC is part of the community.”*

That sense of belonging extended into the classroom, where she found an academic path that aligned with her growing interest in global leadership. Katherine chose to major in international studies, a



multidisciplinary program that draws from political science, economics, language and global affairs, building a foundation for the work she will soon take on overseas.

“It gave me a broader understanding of the world and how different systems and cultures interact,” she said. “That perspective is incredibly valuable in a global role.” Her advice to prospective students is simple: “Take the time to explore what Old Dominion University has to offer,” she said. “You might discover a path you never expected.”

For Katherine, that path is now leading halfway around the world, from a classroom in Norfolk to a leadership role on the global stage. And, while the future may hold unknowns, one thing is certain: she’s ready to lead.

By Virginia Hilton: [Read the original interview here.](#)



## CLASS OF 2026: A NAVY VETERAN’S UNCONVENTIONAL PATH TO ENGINEERING

Jay Belknap (B.S. '26) spent his career learning to build and maintain a power grid for farms and sawmills. Now, the upcoming Old Dominion University graduate is figuring out how to run data centers on it.



As an associate engineer at Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC), a member-owned nonprofit utility serving roughly 30,000 customers across rural southern Virginia, Jay sits at the intersection of old infrastructure and explosive new demand.

Jay joined the Navy at 17, straight out of a rural community and was accepted into the Naval Nuclear Power School. He served five years, including aboard the USS Eisenhower aircraft carrier, a stretch that straddled the September 11 attacks. The work taught him how high-stakes systems fail and recover.

Jay’s father also had a foot in the energy industry. He is a certified arborist for the Accomack and Northampton Electric Cooperative (ANEC) in Virginia. Jay eventually moved two hours west to Mecklenburg Electric, where he’s spent the past 13 years mastering control system architecture, substation operations, radio infrastructure, and automated metering. He shadowed veteran engineers until retirements created space for him to grow into his current role.

Jay’s career trajectory drove him back to school when his supervisor nudged him to finish his [electrical engineering technology degree](#) through ODUGlobal and pursue his Professional Engineer (PE) license. He excelled from the start and was awarded the University’s 2025–26 Electrical Engineering Technology Faculty Award.

By Jonathan Heeter: [Read the full interview here](#)





### **MOUNTAIN BIKE DAY TRIP**

Location: Pocahontas State Park

June 13, 8:00am-5:00pm

\$10 per person

Shred with OAP trip leaders at Pocahontas State Park! No experience needed. Trip fee includes transportation, bike rental, and pure trail magic. A mandatory pre-trip meeting will be held the Sunday before your trip.

Open to ODU alumni, campus community, faculty & staff, and students.



[Register](#)

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### **SURFING & YOGA DAY TRIP**

June 27

\$20 per person

Join us for a day of movement, energy, and ocean vibes on our Surf & Yoga Trip, a collaboration between the Outdoor Adventure Program and Fitness & Wellness. We'll start with a guided beach yoga session to warm up the body and mind, then head into the water to learn and practice the fundamentals of surfing.

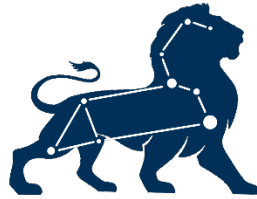
This experience is designed for all skill levels and focuses on building confidence, trying something new, and enjoying time in a supportive, fun environment by the ocean. All equipment, transportation, and the guidance of a knowledgeable trip leader are included in your trip fee. A mandatory pre-trip meeting will be held the Sunday before your trip.



[Register](#)



# @ THE LÊ PLANETARIUM



## Public Planetarium Shows

Wednesday Nights- 7:00pm

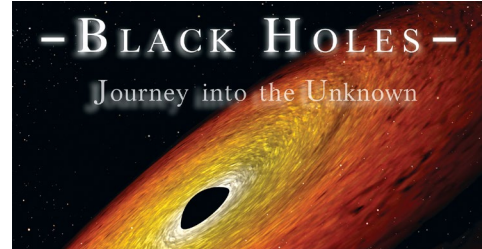
**\$5 per person**

Tickets available at the door 30-minutes before the show.

[www.odu.edu/planetarium](http://www.odu.edu/planetarium)



June 3 – Seeing! A Photon's Journey



June 10 – Black Holes



June 17 & 24 – Tour of the Summer Sky



# AROUND TOWN

## **NORFOLK HARBORFEST 50**

**June 19 - 21, 2026**

**Town Point Park, Downtown Norfolk Waterfront**

**FREE & Open to the Public!**



America's largest, longest-running, free maritime festival, the iconic **Norfolk Harborfest®** enters its 50th year in 2026. For three memorable days along the Downtown Norfolk Waterfront June 19-23, Harborfest celebrates all of the elements that make Norfolk & Hampton Roads a historic maritime & Naval community.

On both land and sea, thrilling activities and live music take center stage at Harborfest, including the annual Parade of Sail featuring international tall ships, one of the largest fireworks shows on the East Coast, interactive family games and activities, Navy exhibits and demonstrations, artisan foods and beverages, national and regional live entertainment, and much more. Mark your calendars for Friday-Sunday, June 19-23, 2026 for one of Hampton Roads' biggest summertime events!

**Featuring Legend**

**PATTI LABELLE**

**FRIDAY, JUNE 19 ON THE MAIN STAGE AT 8:00PM**

**Featured Locals**

**THE LAST BISON**

**SATURDAY, JUNE 20 ON THE MAIN STAGE AT 6:00PM**

*[See the full lineup for Norfolk Harborfest 50 here](#)*



***FRIDAY NIGHT FAMILY FLIX AT THE PORTSMOUTH PAVILION***

Every Friday in June, 7:30-9:00pm  
Porstmouth Pavilion, 16 Crawford Circle

Bring the family for a free movie every Friday Night in June at the Portsmouth Pavilion. Event is FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. Doors open at 7:30pm. Movie starts at sundown. *Outside food is welcome. No outside alcohol will be permitted.*

- June 5** – *SpongeBob Square Pants*
- June 12** – *Lilo & Stitch*
- June 19** – *Zootopia*
- June 25** – *Goat*



***SKYWATCH AT NORTHWEST RIVER PARK (WEATHER DEPENDENT)***

June 6<sup>th</sup>, 8:00pm-midnight  
Free & Open to the Public

Presented by: Back Bay Amateur Astronomers and Chesapeake Parks and Recreation  
Location: Northwest River Park Equestrian Area – 1569 Indian Creek Road



***ARE YOU GAME? SENIOR EDITION***

June 3, 11:00am-12:00pm  
Location: Phoebus Branch Library, 1 South Mallory Street, Hampton

Join us for a fun-filled social hour of games and friendly competition! Call 757-727-1149 to register.



# Sail250®

Sail Virginia<sup>SM</sup> 2026 events will take place across Virginia's Chesapeake Bay region over two weekends in June 2026:

Several Virginia localities will be joining the **official Sail250® Virginia host port of Norfolk, VA** in welcoming tall ships in June 2026. In addition to these harbors, Virginia Beach will host the international fleet of ships at the Lynnhaven anchorage prior to the parade of sail into downtown Norfolk. This collaboration exemplifies the strong regional cooperation that exists as we celebrate the region's rich maritime history and industry, the importance of our military community, and Virginia's connections to the international community.

On the afternoon of June 18 and early on the morning of June 19, 2026, the international fleet will be visible at anchor in the Lynnhaven anchorage near the Lesner Bridge in **Virginia Beach**. The fleet will begin departing the anchorage at 7AM on Friday, June 19, 2026 for the Parade of Sail into downtown Norfolk.

As the Sail250® Virginia host City, **Norfolk, VA** will host the international fleet of tall ships and military vessels from June 19-23, 2026.

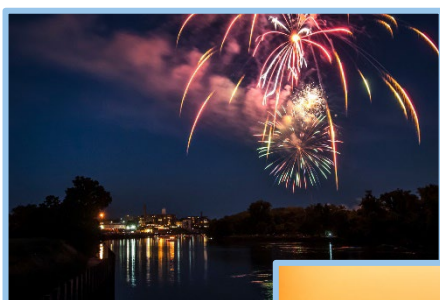
[See the Full List of Events Here](#)

## June 12-14, 2026

Alexandria, VA  
Hampton, VA  
Onancock, VA  
Richmond, VA  
Smithfield/Isle of Wight, VA  
Yorktown, VA

## June 16-23, 2026

Cape Charles (June 19-21)  
Chesapeake (June 19-21)  
Portsmouth (June 19-21)  
Virginia Beach (June 16-19)  
**Norfolk – Official Sail250® Virginia  
Host City (June 19-23)**



## US Navy to Explore Powering Shore Installations with Aircraft Carriers



*The USS Gerald R. Ford returned to Naval Station Norfolk on May 16. (MCS2 Mike Shen/U.S. Navy)*

The [U.S. Navy](#) is planning to bring the nuclear power of its largest aircraft carrier from ship to shore at some point this summer, acting [Navy Secretary Hung Cao](#) revealed during a May 14 U.S. House Armed Services Committee hearing.

Cao stated that Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia will be part of a pilot program exploring the concept of an installation “powered from an aircraft carrier.”

“We’re going to export the energy from the aircraft carrier to the base,” he said. The [American Nuclear Society](#) first reported the Navy’s initiative.

In a statement confirming the plan, a Navy spokesperson told Military Times that the service “is executing a multi-pronged strategy to ensure the delivery of firm, baseload power to our installations for energy resilience and mission assurance.”

“One line of effort in the strategy is to deliver power from a Ford-class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to a compatible shore installation, to demonstrate the capability to meet emergent, mission critical needs,” the spokesperson added. “An initial test of this capability is being planned for later this year at Naval Station Norfolk.”

While neither Cao nor the Navy confirmed the hulking vessel tapped for the assignment, the guinea pig in question is likely the USS Gerald R. Ford, the only Ford-class carrier currently in active service. The sea service’s second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, the [USS John F. Kennedy](#), completed sea trials earlier this year.



The Ford recently returned from a historic 322-day deployment, during which time the ship and its strike group participated in Operation Epic Fury in the Middle East and operations Southern Spear and Absolute Resolve in U.S. Southern Command.

During the May 14 hearing, Cao noted that the possibilities generated by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier could be innovative — with its power being used to fix military bases or to supply fresh, potable water to drought-stricken places like California.

In the same hearing, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle noted that the aim is to create a Navy reactor pilot program comparable to that of the already established Army and Air Force programs.

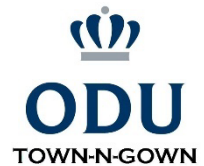
“We need an overall programmatic champion for the SMR program,” Caudle said. Adding that the Navy needed to stop “dithering.”

“While the Army may be tapped to be the overall lead for it, I see no world in which the Navy is not going to be part of that discussion and bring our expertise through our long-established naval reactors, deep understanding of reactor physics, and understanding safe operation,” he said. “But we need to get a pilot established and a target date and get one going.”

**By Claire Barrett and DefenseNews.com: [Read the original article here.](#)**



# TOWN-N-GOWN NOTES



## Town-N-Gown Board Meetings

Members are always welcome at the board meetings as well as attending any associated scheduled tours.

Upcoming board meetings:

**Tuesday, June 2, 2026, 9:30am** – Global Friendship House at 1241 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> St, Norfolk VA 23508.

Tour facilities with speaker Elaine Rodriquez at 11:00am, parking at 43rd St Garage, adjacent to Chartway Arena

## It's Time to Renew! 2026-2027 Dues are due!

That's right, it's time to renew your membership with Town-N-Gown. The 2026-2027 memberships renew in July, and annual dues are due. You can fill out the membership application/renewal at the end of this newsletter or find the application available as a PDF or Word document on our website:

<https://www.odutng.com/application>

## Town-N-Gown would like to welcome our newest members:

*Vanessa & Sean Scannell*

## Board Members July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

*President:* Jo Hayden

*Vice President (Activities/Events):* Jennifer Pegues

*Vice President (Membership):* Mary Lou Speckheuer

*Corresponding Secretary:* Patricia Steele

*Recording Secretary:* Pamela McNaught

*Treasurer:* Lawrence Owes

*Directors-at-Large (2026-2028):* David Heath, Justin Mason, Helmut Speckheuer

*Nominating Committee 2027:* Pamela McNaught (Chair), Veleka Gatling, Justin Mason, Patricia Steele, and Wilma Robinson

**Town-N-Gown website is live!** If you have not yet seen our website, take a minute to visit! The site has all the essential information about Town-N-Gown as well as history, photos of past events, upcoming events, and the previous issues of the TNG newsletter. Have a look at [www.ODUTNG.com](http://www.ODUTNG.com).



*IT'S TIME TO RENEW!*

Dues for 2026-2027 membership are due now!

**TOWN-N-GOWN MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

**Membership dues are \$25.00 and include a spouse/partner (single address).**

Type of Membership (Check one): New \_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_ (*All members must renew!*)

Names(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(List both names if a dual membership)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home): \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

(Cell) \_\_\_\_\_ (Please indicate your contact preference.)

Please circle your primary affiliation for T-N-G: *Town* *National Defense* *Gown*

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

(Email addresses are very important for sending updates and special messages – please update TNG when you change addresses! Town-N-Gown does NOT share your contact information with any organizations other than the ODU Events Office to use for invitations.)

Make checks payable to **Town-N-Gown** and mail to:

Lawrence Owes  
P.O. Box 51  
Portsmouth, VA 23705

For questions, contact Mary Lou Speckheuer at (757) 285-2722 | marylou110@cox.net

**Thank you for continuing your support of Town-N-Gown at ODU!!!**