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TOP STORY

Tall-ship adventure

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Devon Roche aboard the tall ship Lynx in Baltimore, Md.
Courtesy of Egan Maritime Institute

(July 30, 2026) Laying eyes on, let alone stepping aboard the famed Italian tall ship *Amerigo Vespucci* was something rising Nantucket High School junior Robert Graves never imagined he’d get to experience.

But thanks to the Egan Maritime Institute’s Sea of Opportunities program, he was able to explore what was once hailed by the *USS Independence* as the most beautiful ship in the world in Boston earlier this month.

“That’s a ship that I’ve always dreamed of getting to go on and see in person,” Graves said. “I waited like an hour and a half in line to go on, but it was worth it.”

Graves is one of eight Nantucket students who were sponsored by Egan Maritime to participate in Sail250, a global gathering of tall ships that sailed along the East Coast to celebrate America’s semiquincentennial. The flotilla stopped in New Orleans, La., Norfolk, Va., Baltimore, Md., New York City and Boston.

Graves and three other students joined Nantucket's tall ship *Lynx*, a replica War of 1812 privateer, alongside more than 60 other tall ships in Boston, while another four were aboard in Baltimore in late June.

In both ports, the students joined the vessel's crew, performing duties on deck and interacting with some of the thousands of tourists that came aboard while docked.

It was an "unforgettable experience" for the young sailors, said Carlisle Jensen, executive director of Egan Maritime.

"More importantly, these trips pushed them beyond their comfort zones, as they were asked to work alongside the crew, welcoming visitors during public deck sails, giving interviews to the press and acting as ambassadors for Egan Maritime," she said.

"They're not sitting back. We put them to work," said Donald Peacock, captain of the *Lynx* and president of the Lynx Educational Foundation.

"When they're working with us, it's a platform of personal development, of self-discovery. Let's see what they can find," Peacock said.

That sentiment is the backbone of the partnership between Egan Maritime and the *Lynx*. Typically, more than 300 students board the vessel each summer to immerse themselves in Nantucket's maritime history and oceanography while learning new skills, building confidence and applying what they learn in the classroom to their sailing experiences.

That was certainly the case for Graves, a member of Nantucket Boy Scout Troop 97. He had the chance to apply skills like knot-tying he learned through the scouts that he normally doesn't have the chance to utilize, he said.

The Sail250 trip was his third time aboard the *Lynx*. He previously sailed for two days in eighth grade, and did a four-day sail around the Cape and Islands last spring. From those experiences, he's had meaningful takeaways, he said.

"Something I've really taken out of it is the work ethic of it. It takes a lot of work to get those boats moving, and it takes a lot of precision and patience to get it right," Graves said.

"I feel honored to be given this opportunity, and so thankful for Egan. It's helped me a lot in the past few years just finding myself, finding my place on the water. I really would have never found out about this love for sailing that I have without (it)."

Aside from touring the *Amerigo Vespucci*, Graves said his highlights included being surrounded by so many different cultures in Boston. Many international ships took part in the parade of sail, and with them came sailors and spectators from all walks of life.

"There was such a diverse community there. We'd be walking around the Seaport, looking at ships, and you just hear so many different languages . . . some of them I've never even heard before," Graves said. "(People) came across the country just to see their country's ship and represent their country, and that was something I found really cool."

He fondly recalled seeing ships like the Dominican Republic's *Juan Bautista Cambiaso* and the Argentinian *ARA Libertad*, which were often playing music aboard.

"They had like a live mariachi band on board at one point, and everyone was just having a good time," Graves said. "It was so cool just seeing all these different nationalities and people representing different places all in one place."

Hearing the sound of the *Lynx*'s cannon echo over Boston as it entered the harbor was another highlight, he said.

"You could hear the echo throughout the city for like a good three or four seconds after. The entire city probably heard it," he said.

Devon Roche, a rising sophomore at Nantucket High School, was aboard the *Lynx* in Baltimore. It was her second time aboard the ship.

Each time, the crew has been incredibly welcoming, she said.

"You immediately become part of the crew," Roche said.

She recalled battling stifling heat while performing on-deck duties, and interacting with those that came aboard for tours.

"I was sitting right next to the bell, and they asked a lot if they could ring it," she said.

Her favorite memory was going aloft in the *Lynx*'s rigging to watch the U.S. Navy's Blue Angels fly overhead.

"It was scary at first because you weren't harnessed, but once you got up there, you were harnessed, and it was fine," she said.

For Peacock, the trip was significant for several reasons. He witnessed the bicentennial parade of sail in Boston as a senior in high school in 1976. Fifty years later, he found himself at the helm of a tall ship inspiring a new generation of sailors.

All the while, he had the privilege of sailing beside his son Alex, who captains the Arctic schooner *Bowdoin*, belonging to Maine Maritime Academy, which also took part in the parade of sail.

"For a couple of Nantucket summer residents to be able to father-son tall ships in Boston was pretty special," Peacock said.

Bowdoin also had an Egan Maritime Sea of Opportunities alum onboard in Cecelia Wendelken, who is attending Maine Maritime Academy tuition-free after being named one of the Nantucket Golf Club Foundation's Nantucket Scholars in 2025.

Wendelken will be aboard the *Bowdoin* the next time it travels to the Arctic in 2027.

For Peacock, that served as a prime example of how the Sea of Opportunities program can be more than just an opportunity to set sail for students. It can be a launching pad for what he calls "a very legitimate career direction" in the maritime industry.

"That's something that was really fostered here on Nantucket with our relationship with Egan Maritime," Peacock said of Wendelken being aboard the *Bowdoin*.

"They have the kids, and we have the platform, and together we've created this very unique opportunity through donors that kids, public and private schools, can participate in," he said.

"That's the way you keep maritime going. That's the way you keep traditional ships going . . . I always want somebody's time spent on *Lynx* to be able to go and share a bigger vision of what they know to another ship."

Peacock said the Sail250 trip would not have been possible without the *Lynx*'s dedicated crew, who worked long, grueling days in the Georgia heat in the off-season to ensure the ship was ready for the voyage.

"I'm nobody without this crew," he said. "I am not the standout here. It's Captain Sean (Canniff) and the crew and the team that we've put together to make this work."

The ship itself is a representation of a young America's fight for survival. The *Lynx* is a Baltimore clipper-style privateer built in the image of ships used to fight the British in the War of 1812, often called the second war of independence. Part of *Lynx*'s programming includes teaching that history.

"This ship's alignment with early American development is important, and as stewards of the ship, we have a responsibility to present everything," Peacock said.

For more information on the *Lynx*, visit www.tallshiplynx.org. To learn more about the Egan Maritime Institute, visit www.eganmaritime.org

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