



## NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT:

### Q&A with Captain Lauren of the *Kalmar Nyckel* BY KELLY BASILE

» In August the State Chamber hoisted its sails and hosted an Evening Mixer on the *Kalmar Nyckel*. We gave 100 attendees pirate alter egos and enjoyed perfect summer weather on Delaware's Tall Ship. One pirate in particular caught our attention: Captain Lauren Morgens, Ship's Master. We caught up with her before she set sail again on the high seas...

#### **You're the captain of a ship! How did you end up with this career?**

I discovered tall ships by doing a college semester program at sea. Academically, it was focused on Oceanography, but I fell in love with the sailing and with experiential education programs. I wasn't quite 19 years old when I went home and told my parents I was going to be a sea captain. They were intrigued, to say the least!

#### **When did you start working for the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation?**

I was hired at the *Kalmar Nyckel* as Chief Mate (second in command) in 2004. I had sailed a number of tall ships already, but I applied to the *Nyckel* because it was one of the most interesting ships in the country. Joining as a mate was quite a challenge because not only is the *Nyckel* a complicated ship in her own right, but the volunteer crew is a very large, very active community. It's important to get to know each and every crewmember to learn how to make the crew function as a "superorganism."

**What are your daily responsibilities on the ship and what do you love most about your job?**

First and foremost, my job is always to be thinking about keeping the ship, crew and passengers safe in everything we do. For example, I pay a lot of attention to weather forecasts so we can attempt to not be surprised by bad weather when out sailing. On a daily basis, I am navigating, sailing and docking the ship; teaching the two mates who work under me how to do those jobs; thinking about how to structure and train the crew; planning our daily schedule; planning our maintenance and time off. Hopefully I can even find time to participate in things like maintenance as well!

It's easy to say that I love sailing the ship, because who wouldn't? Tall ships are such a romantic spectacle – sometimes it's strange to think I get paid to do it! But if one digs a little deeper, this is a job like any other. It's sometimes rewarding, sometimes exhausting, but also very demanding of time and energy. I love sharing the ship's experience with others.

**The *Kalmar Nyckel* has a rich history from being a warship to establishing present-day Wilmington. Why is it important to continue this Tall Ship's legacy by sailing her and educating the community through the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation?**

Proximally, I think it's important for us as a nation to understand how we came to be who we are today. This story involves a tiny sliver of the colonial

story, but it's amazing how nuanced a story it is, and how often it deviates from the "expected" narrative of American colonization.

More broadly, the ship offers a great opportunity to look at human ingenuity in a very different form than the technologies we use every day. The ship is large and complex – a bit of an engineering marvel – and yet it relies on the power of human muscle to set the system in motion. That's really a very unusual approach by today's standard. It forces us all to coordinate into a "super-organism," where the crew and even the public work together to get a job done. In the 21st century, we are so accustomed to valuing productivity on an individual level that this can be a very new experience for people. Understanding all the different ways that work can be achieved keeps our minds and our "toolbox" open to innovation.

And finally, academically, the ship offers a platform where nearly any subject can be brought to life. Our education programming on the *Kalmar Nyckel* focuses most on the social studies (history, economics, geography) and math/physics (navigation, simple machines) elements of our story, but with more time there is almost no subject that cannot be taught through the lens of a sailing ship. It's always my hope that after a school program on the *Kalmar Nyckel*, teachers back in the classroom can leverage the experience to spark kids' enthusiasm for learning on a wide variety of subjects.

**Just about everyone in Delaware knows what the *Kalmar Nyckel* is, but do you have any parting secrets you can share?**

You know, even after fifteen years of working on the ship, I'm still surprised sometimes by what people would consider secrets of the ship! Many are fascinated by the fact that, when we are traveling, the entire crew lives on board together. Others by the fact that, when the ship is in the ocean, we have to take turns being awake all night because there's no real way to "pull over" and take a nap.

Another tall ship sailor would be surprised by neither of these but are usually amazed that we have a washing machine and dryer on board. Luxury living!

Home in Wilmington, I think it surprises people that there is a bridge at the entrance to the Christina River (I-495) that the ship's masts don't fit under. We have to lower the top half of them just to get home. Putting them back up takes a whole lot of work using those human-powered simple machines I mentioned.

There are so many details. The best way to discover them is to come for a sail and talk to the crew. Most are volunteers who have taken our crew training class and learned how to sail a 17th-Century ship. Or, even better, take that class and come learn the secrets in person!

To learn more, visit:  
[www.KalmarNyckel.org](http://www.KalmarNyckel.org)