

[PRESS RELEASE]

Operation Seafarer Vaccination Launches in Savannah, Georgia

(SAVANNAH, GA) International seafarers were vaccinated in Savannah on Monday, May 24 at 8:45 a.m. as part of Operation Seafarer Vaccination. The new project was developed by the Rotary Club of Savannah (RCoS) in partnership with the Chatham County Health Department/Coastal Health District, Community Organized Relief Efforts (CORE), Curogram, Georgia Ports Authority, Colonial Group, Inc., Viksniks Consultants and Maritime Bethel Savannah.

Seafarers on the Yasa Flamingo were among those vaccinated and are from Turkey and the Philippines where getting a vaccine isn't easy.

"This vaccine for us is very important and we feel many things because now we feel more strong, more comfortable," said Captain Idris Karahan, Master of the Yasa Flamingo. "I know my relatives, many relatives, pass away due to COVID situation and we are almost two years and living through so afraid and confused, but now we have hope."

The project development was started by RCoS member Lux "Captain" Lakshman at the request of Rotary's District Governor, Steve Barnes, to assist citizens in India with COVID-related needs. With familiarity with both India and the shipping industry, Captain Lakshman shared that seafarers on ships both freighter and tankers are confined to their ships in all ports of call around the world, with no access to the vaccine. This means that many of these seamen have not left their ships in well over a year.

"They have not been allowed to go home," said Captain Lux Lakshman, President of Viksniks Consultants, Inc." Many of them are stuck on the ship for over a year so it is a big thing that once they get vaccinated now they can make plans to go home."

CORE, the Chatham County Health Department, and Curogram joined the project as COVID-19 relief service providers to staff a mobile vaccination unit and provide COVID-19 vaccines. Patients were offered the 1-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

With 4,000 ships and 75,000 seafarers entering the port of Savannah annually, Captain Lakshman saw an opportunity to make a global impact close to home by using this as an opportunity to provide a means to safely administer vaccines to seafarers. The Rotary Club of Savannah has taken up the project of vaccinating as many seafarers as possible with various stakeholders either by taking the crew members to the vaccination site or by bringing a team of nurses from CORE (coreresponse.org) and vaccine on board. This is done at no cost to the seafarers or the shipping companies.

The initiative will not only positively affect India, but it will impact health on a global scale as it will have a measurable impact on disease prevention, which is number one

on the list of Rotary's top seven causes. The proposed goal is to vaccinate 50-70% of seafarers coming into the port of Savannah over the next 100 days.

How does the program work? Where are the shots given?

If a crew member has a valid visa and is permitted by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection to go ashore, we can arrange for them to be transported to the Chatham County Health Department COVID-19 vaccination annex with the help of Maritime Bethel.

For crew members who are detained on board, the team from CORE will go onboard and vaccinate the crew.

Why is this project so important?

"It is our moral obligation to get these seafarers vaccinated so they are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve for their great efforts during the pandemic. The seafarers on the ship who are a big part of this supply chain have been neglected since the pandemic and many have not been allowed to disembark and go home because many countries are not allowing them to transit as they have not been vaccinated. The crew can feel confident when dealing with shore personnel. They can also start making plans to go home as many have been stuck on the ship for over a year. The transmission into the community will also be reduced as they come into contact with the pilots, longshoremen and other personnel who have to go onboard to carry out their duties. On an average there are between 5 and 10 ships a day that come into Savannah that will need these services," said Capt. Lux Lakshman

"CORE, the Georgia Department of Public Health, and Curogram have partnered to provide COVID-19 vaccines throughout the state of Georgia. We are excited about partnering with the Chatham County Health Department, the Rotary Club of Savannah, the Georgia Ports Authority, the Colonial Group, and Maritime Bethel Savannah to vaccinate ship staff and passengers to reach our goal of expanding access to COVID-19 relief services to everyone. Our relief efforts in emergency response are most impactful when stakeholders of the community are activated," said CORE Georgia Co-Area Director Jonathan Golden.

"Ships carrying goods and products to the Georgia Ports is an important economic driver for Savannah, the state of Georgia, and the world," said Chris Rustin, Chatham County Health Department Administrator. "Providing life-saving vaccinations to the seafarers not only protects their health and the health of port personnel, but also allows these seafarers to continue their important logistical work across the globe. The Chatham County Health Department is pleased to partner with CORE, Rotary Club of Savannah, the Georgia Ports, the Colonial Group, Viksniks Consultants and Maritime Bethel Savannah to make this vaccination opportunity available."

ABOUT CORE

CORE (Community Organized Relief Effort) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving lives and strengthening communities affected by or vulnerable to crisis. Within hours of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, founder Sean Penn mobilized a powerful network to take immediate action. More than 10 years later, CORE continues to lead sustainable programs focused on four pillars: emergency relief, disaster preparedness, environmental resiliency and community building. The organization has expanded beyond Haiti to support communities in The Bahamas, Puerto Rico and the United States. CORE has taken a leadership position in the COVID-19 response to provide free testing for high-risk individuals and vulnerable communities. CORE Georgia More information: www.corerresponse.org/covid19 and follow CORE on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

ABOUT THE COASTAL HEALTH DISTRICT/CHATHAM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Chatham County Health Department is part of the eight-county Coastal Health District which also includes health departments and public health facilities in Bryan, Camden, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, and McIntosh counties. The mission of all health departments in the Coastal Health District is to improve the health of those who live, work, and play in those counties by preventing disease, injury and disability; promoting health and well being; and preparing for and responding to disasters. The Georgia Department of Public Health is the lead agency for Georgia's 18 health districts. For more information, please visit www.gachd.org.

ABOUT VIKSNIKS

Viksniks is a premier business process accelerator serving clients in a variety of industries, including shipping, healthcare, city and county administrations and courthouses.

www.viksniks.com

ABOUT COLONIAL GROUP INC.

A fourth generation family-owned business founded in 1921, Colonial Group Inc. ("Colonial Group") is a diversified energy and port-related company headquartered in Savannah and one of America's largest privately-held companies. In 2021, the company marks its 100th anniversary by celebrating with its dedicated team of more than 2,000 employees, giving to hometown causes and observing historical milestones. Over the years, the business has diversified to be the umbrella company of Colonial Oil, Colonial Terminals, Colonial Fuel & Lubricant Services, Enmark Stations/enmarket, Colonial Compliance Systems, Colonial Energy, Colonial Chemical Solutions, Colonial Towing, Savannah Yacht Center and Aqua Smart. For more information on Colonial Group Inc., please visit www.colonialgroupinc.com.

ABOUT ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

The vision of Rotary is "Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change—across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves."

www.rotary.org

ABOUT THE ROTARY CLUB OF SAVANNAH: The Rotary Club of Savannah includes 200 community leaders and volunteers. Over the past 107 years, the club has championed local and regional developments that include completing the road to Tybee Island, improving the Savannah River for commercial traffic, enhancing the Dixie Highway system in southeast Georgia and building bridges over the Savannah and Altamaha Rivers. Most recently, in recognition of its 100th anniversary, the club raised funds and built an all-accessible playground in Forsyth Park. Meetings are held each Monday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the DeSoto Hotel, 15 E. Liberty St. For more information, visit www.savrotary.org

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