

Description of Highlighted Commissioning Week Activities

from the USNA Alumni Association

Each year about 1,000 midshipmen graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy. Graduation week would not be complete without fireworks, rigorous challenges and fighter plane demonstrations that mark the annual rite of passage. Because the Naval Academy is strongly tied to the Annapolis community, many residents look forward to these long-standing traditions each spring.

Here are descriptions of many highlights usually held during Commissioning Week which occur on the Naval Academy grounds in Annapolis. All events are free unless otherwise indicated.

Flag Raising

Each weekday morning during Commissioning Week, the Marines, accompanied by the Naval Academy Band, will raise the U.S. flag at Tecumseh Court.

Herndon Monument Climb

A symbolic Naval Academy tradition, the Herndon Monument Climb, or Herndon Hustle, marks a plebe's ascent from freshman to upperclassman. For their final assignment of the year, plebes scale a 21-foot obelisk covered with more than 200 pounds of lard. Through teamwork and perseverance, the group's goal is to attempt to raise one of them to the top to switch a white plebe "Dixie cup" hat with an upperclassman's hat. After the Herndon climb is complete, the plebes earn their new title of fourth classmen.

According to Naval Academy lore, the first plebe to scale the monument and switch the hats will be the first member of the class to become an admiral. The standing record to beat is 1 hour, 14 minutes and 15 seconds, set in 2006, but the climb can last as long as four hours. The climb starts at the Herndon Monument, outside the Naval Academy Chapel.

Fireworks and Ring Dance

Each Naval Academy class designs its own ring with a unique crest. Second-Class midshipmen do not wear their rings until they are officially "baptized," or dipped in the Seven Seas -- literally, a mixture of waters from around the world. This ritual is not open to the public. In the past years, a fireworks display at the Naval Academy's Farragut Field has taken place simultaneously with the Ring Dance. The fireworks can be viewed from neighborhoods surrounding the Academy at 10 p.m. Saturday in downtown Annapolis.

Dedication Parade

The first Dedication Parade at the Naval Academy was in 1969. The yearly dress parade honors academy faculty members who are retiring or completing 20 or more years of service, or who have been selected as professors emeriti. Various awards and honors are handed out during the ceremony to commend teaching, service and leadership.

Trident Brass Quintet

The U.S. Naval Academy brass quintet performs traditional and contemporary music. The band, comprising five professional musicians, was formed in 1967. Today it entertains the public throughout the region with music from ragtime to modern brass compositions.

Glee Club Concerts

The Men's Glee Club is the largest and most active of the Naval Academy's musical organizations. The group has appeared on the "Today Show," at presidential inaugural galas and at the Kennedy Center, and has toured nationally. Both Glee Clubs will perform during Commissioning Week.

Blue Angels

The Blue Angels, known officially as the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, have performed their precision flying demonstrations for millions of spectators. Their appearance during Commissioning Week is a 50-year tradition. Unfortunately, in 2012 the Blue Angels will not be performing due to schedule conflicts. They are, however, scheduled to fly over during the Graduation Ceremony.

Organ Concert

Monte Maxwell, organist and assistant director of musical activities at the Naval Academy, performs every Sunday during Catholic Mass. For Commissioning Week, Maxwell will perform in a public concert.

Gospel Choir

The Naval Academy Gospel Choir tours twice a year, bringing spirituals and old-fashioned gospel to people across the country. The choir also sings at the Academy's Sunday chapel services, local schools, conferences and community centers. In a yearly tradition, the choir hosts a Commissioning Week concert to lift people out of their seats.

Color Parade

The Color Parade is the oldest special parade at the U.S. Naval Academy, a tradition that began in 1871. In its last full dress parade, the company that has excelled academically, athletically, and professionally throughout the year is honored by receiving the "colors" (company flags) of last year's winners. The event is open to the public, but seating is only for Academy faculty, staff, family and friends of graduating midshipmen.