

https://www.postandcourier.com/news/ship-charleston-new-york-school-memorial-day-tours/article_7214do15-76fd-4a21-bb14-1aoff4d85df5.html

A ship carrying over 500 cadets docks in Charleston Harbor during Memorial Day weekend

MORGAN COOK MOCOOK@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

MAY 23, 2026



The Empire State VII is docked in Charleston through Memorial Day weekend in hopes of recruiting new prospect students.

PROVIDED//SUNY MARITIME COLLEGE

CHARLESTON — Dozens of ships sail in and out of the city's waterways each week, but this Memorial Day weekend brings a newcomer to the docks.

A national security multi-mission vessel, carrying more than 500 cadets from the Bronx-based **SUNY Maritime College**, arrived at the Port of Charleston on May 22.

The Empire State VII, delivered in 2023, was built as a purpose training ship and to respond to national disasters. It will stay in Charleston until May 25 before heading to Spain.

During the ship's stay, the public will have the opportunity to climb on board either for an information session starting at 10 a.m. May 23 or tours on May 24 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

“We are bringing the school ship here for recruiting, first and foremost,” said John Okon, admiral and president of SUNY Maritime College. “There are a number of kids that are from this area — Charleston, North Charleston — that live on the water. They don’t know that there is a career college that can bring their love of the ocean to a natural career in the U.S.”

The cadets on board are part of the regimental program obtaining their U.S. Coast Guard license. These cadets are shipped out for eight weeks on a Summer Sea Term training program. Cadets pursuing a U.S. Coast Guard license are required to complete seagoing experiences.

Over the next eight weeks, the cadets’ schedules will rotate with two days of instruction, two days of maintenance and then two days of deck side throughout their time, Capt. Christopher Zola said.

“Every day, these cadets grow one more step closer, they evolve whether it’s through maintenance, training, instruction, watch keeping. It is a seven-day cycle out here,” Okon said.

Charleston is the first stop on the ship’s journey. The ship will then travel to Malaga, Spain; Belfast, Northern Ireland; New York City to take part in [Sail4th 250 event](#), and then to Albany, N.Y. The ship will return to campus on July 16.

“This is such a transformational experience,” Okon said. “These young people are going to spend months at sea.”

Reach **Morgan Cook** at 843-459-0577.

MORGAN COOK1

Morgan Cook is an intern trending reporter. She has previously interned for the Columbia newsroom. She is a junior journalism major at the University of South Carolina.