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NAVY MEMORIAL HOSTS 20TH ANNUAL "BLESSING OF THE FLEETS"
Navy Memorial Pays Homage to Sailors & Fishermen Worldwide with Maritime Tradition
Event Coincides With Debut of New Exhibit "The Art of Naval Aviation"

Washington, D.C. (March 3, 2011)– Passed down through generations of mariners and navies around the world, the annual Blessing of the Fleets tradition will be held for the 20th consecutive year at the United States Navy Memorial on **Saturday, April 9 at 1:00pm**. Held on the outdoor plaza, the event is free and open to the public and begins right after the Cherry Blossom Festival Parade. This event is part of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

The centuries-old "Blessing of the Fleets" ceremony is intended to safeguard crews and ships from the danger of the seas through a traditional blessing given by a clergyman at the water's edge.

The Blessing of the Fleets' highlight occurs when Sailors from the U.S. Navy's Ceremonial Guard proceed across the Memorial Plaza's "Granite Sea" to pour water from the Seven Seas and the Great Lakes into the surrounding fountains, "charging" them to life and ushering in the spring season. Ceremonial music is provided by the U.S. Navy Band.

Following the ceremony, culinary specialists from the White House Mess will prepare and serve Navy bean soup to visitors in the adjacent Naval Heritage Center. Visitors are invited to relax in the Naval Heritage Center's Burke Theater for a musical performance by the Washington Revels Maritime Voices. Singing "Songs of the Sea and Shore," the musical group will portray the old life at sea and back home, including the sailors' use of sea chanteys and the joys and hardships of the women ashore.

This year's Blessing of the Fleets coincides with the opening of "The Art of Naval Aviation," a new exhibit to feature 35 original artworks, illustrating the history and evolution of Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard aviation. The artwork, on loan from the U.S. Navy's Art Collection, the Coast Guard Art Program and the Navy Memorial's collection, has been put together from artists who come from all walks of life.

The exhibit will be on display at the Navy Memorial from April 2011 through March 2012. It will be accompanied by numerous public events throughout the year, including films, artist gallery talks, book signings, children's activities, and ceremonies for active duty personnel and their families. An online exhibit of the art will be available at www.navymemorial.org and a collection of naval aviation-related films will be housed on a special channel of Navy TV (www.navytv.org).

About the United States Navy Memorial
Conveniently located on Pennsylvania Avenue – halfway between the White House and the Capitol, the United States Navy Memorial provides a living tribute to Navy people and a place for them to gather and celebrate their service. The outdoor plaza features a "Granite Sea" map of the world, towering masts with signal flags, fountain pools and waterfalls and The Lone Sailor© statue. Adjacent to the plaza is the Naval Heritage Center, where visitors can find

educational displays about the contributions of the men and women of the Sea Services (Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine). Also housed in the Naval Heritage Center is the Navy Log – the online place for Navy people to stay connected with each other, celebrate their service and preserve the memories of their service. There, Navy veterans can build a record of their service online. Call (202) 737-2300 or visit www.navymemorial.org for more information.

About the National Cherry Blossom Festival

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is Washington, DC's and the nation's greatest springtime celebration. The 2011 Festival, March 26 – April 10, includes three spectacular weekends and daily events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit. The 2011 Festival commemorates the 99th anniversary of the gift of the cherry blossom trees and the enduring friendship between the United States and Japan. www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org.

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