

# Carnival Cruise Lines will return to Norfolk in 2015

## RICHMOND

Carnival Cruise Lines is returning to Norfolk next year, Gov. Terry McAuliffe told the General Assembly on Monday night.

The world's largest cruise line intends to resume sailing from Norfolk in spring 2015, McAuliffe announced.

"This renewed activity in Hampton Roads will not only generate important tourism dollars for the commonwealth, but will also be a catalyst for job growth," he said in his first address to General Assembly members.

"I am delighted to welcome Carnival back to Virginia next year, but my administration's goal is to encourage them to bring more ship calls and ultimately, regular homeport service to downtown Norfolk, and to continue to grow our tourism economy across the commonwealth."

The announcement comes 2-1/2 months after the Carnival Glory pulled out of Norfolk for Miami, leaving the city's 7-year-old, \$37.4 million Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center without a ship that calls it home.

"I can confirm that Carnival Cruise Lines is returning to Norfolk in 2015 to operate a series of cruises in the spring and fall," Jennifer de la Cruz, a spokeswoman for the Miami-based cruise line, wrote in an email to The Virginian-Pilot on Monday.

"Specific ship, date and itinerary information is still being finalized and more specific details are expected to be announced this spring. We would like to thank the port, and local and state leadership, for their continued partnership and we greatly look forward to returning to Norfolk next year."

Norfolk officials said they expect Carnival to offer 10 to 12 cruise departures in 2015, with Caribbean ports being the likely destinations.

While Carnival will be heading back to Norfolk next year, the cruise line hasn't reversed decisions to pull out of two other East Coast ports - Baltimore and Boston.

Carnival's last scheduled cruise from Baltimore is in November. It ended cruises from Boston last year.

Norfolk officials said Monday that they remained in constant contact with Carnival after the cruise line announced in late June that it was leaving.

"We never gave up; we continued pursuing it," Marcus Jones, Norfolk's city manager, said Monday.

He said that data showing the "drive-to" cruise market within a 5-hour radius of Norfolk played a key role in the city's efforts to win back Carnival's business.

This year will be the first since 2001 that Carnival has not had a ship homeported in Norfolk.

While clearly enthused about Carnival's return, Mayor Paul Fraim did not sound particularly surprised.

"It is good news for us, good news for the cruise-ship industry," he said. "... Don't think when they left they ever

thought they would leave permanently, quite honestly. They never said they were leaving permanently; they always indicated they hoped to come back. So they've come back within a year."

Fraim said that while the city had not offered Carnival any incentives to come back, he suggested that the state might.

"We live in a very competitive environment with cruise ships," he said. "And we know that both Maryland and South Carolina, their states provide marketing dollars to aid the sale of tickets. And we hope that the commonwealth will do the same."

Fraim said McAuliffe, whom he praised for helping win back Carnival, is committed to doing everything possible to have a ship homeported in Norfolk year-round.

"He gets it; he acts quickly," Fraim said. "The one thing about Gov. McAuliffe is he knows most captains of industry well. He is able to make phone calls returned quickly, and he has been of great assistance in this regard."

Carnival declined to offer any specifics on its reasons for the return to Norfolk.

The cruise line periodically makes "itinerary adjustments," de la Cruz stated.

Carnival's return could mean millions of dollars for city coffers. Since its opening in 2007, Half Moone had generated more than \$8.5 million in direct revenue as of August. That's in addition to nearly \$49 million in indirect revenue from sources such as hotel stays, shopping and other spending by passengers and cruise-ship employees, Norfolk officials said.

When Carnival announced it was leaving Norfolk in late June, it cited new environmental requirements beginning in 2015 related to the sulfur content in fuel used by cruise ships.

The changes "would significantly impact our fuel costs for operating cruises from Norfolk and many other ports around North America," a Carnival spokesman wrote last year.

In September, however, Carnival and the Environmental Protection Agency announced an "agreement in principle" that will let the cruise line install "scrubbers" on 32 of its vessels, utilizing the same kind of technology used in power plants, factories and vehicles to "clean - or scrub - the exhaust from high-sulfur fuel."

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