

Norfolk Naval Shipyard Celebrated 140 Graduates at Annual Apprentice Graduation



NORFOLK, Va. – Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY) recognized 140 graduates from its 2026 apprentice program during a graduation and awards ceremony Oct. 6 at the Harrison Opera House in Norfolk.

The graduates completed the shipyard's four-year apprenticeship, which combines academic coursework, trade theory and on-the-job training to prepare employees for careers as journeymen in their respective trades. The program supports NNSY's mission to provide maintenance, modernization and inactivation services for the U.S. Navy fleet.

Rear Adm. Kavon Hakimzadeh, commander of Norfolk Naval Shipyard, provided remarks and introduced keynote speaker Don

Roberts, a longtime Hampton Roads broadcaster and community advocate.

“Tonight’s graduates are the next generation of shipyard journeymen keeping our Navy fit to fight,” Hakimzadeh said. “Our apprentices and our journeymen provide the backbone of our waterfront workforce and are instrumental to that success.”

Roberts reflected on the value of service, mentorship and community engagement as he congratulated the graduates on reaching the milestone.

“Be so good at whatever you do, so that whenever you’re gone, we miss you,” Roberts said. “We are apprentices for life, always needing to learn something.”

The class valedictorian was Victoria Cutchin, a Shop 72 rigger in the lifting and handling department. Cutchin entered the apprenticeship in August 2022 and completed the program with a 3.95 grade-point average. She earned an early promotion to journeyman mechanic after meeting academic, trade-theory and on-the-job training performance requirements.

Cutchin is the first apprentice from the line handler shop to be named class valedictorian in over 20 years at NNSY .

“We have all had different journeys, but they all brought us here together tonight,” Cutchin said. “This has been a long journey, but one that we should all be proud to complete. In closing this chapter, we are beginning a new one, and I am so excited to see where it leads us.”

During the ceremony, Hakimzadeh and NNSY Apprentice Program Administrator Valerie Simmons presented graduation certificates to the Class of 2026. The program also recognized individual achievements through the Outstanding Apprentice Award, Demonstrated and Potential Leadership Award, and Apprentice Scholarship Award.

The ceremony included representatives from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship; Tidewater Community College; and NNSY's chapters of National Association of Superintendents; the Federal Managers Association; and the Naval Civilian Managers Association.

The NNSY Apprentice Program has been a longstanding workforce development program at the shipyard for more than 100 years. It prepares apprentices through a structured combination of classroom instruction and practical experience servicing ships and submarines assigned to the fleet.

Norfolk Naval Shipyard is one of the largest, most historic, and most multifaceted shipyards in the nation. Its mission is to modernize, repair and inactivate Navy warships, supporting fleet readiness and the Navy's ability to operate worldwide. Its skilled workforce delivers the technical expertise and craftsmanship needed to sustain the fleet and support national security.

From Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Oct. 7, 2026