

Eastern Shipbuilding Group Performs Keel-Laying for Offshore Patrol Cutter



An artist's rendering of the offshore patrol cutter. Eastern Shipbuilding Group

PANAMA CITY, Fla. – Eastern Shipbuilding Group held a keel-laying ceremony for the U.S. Coast Guard's first-of-class offshore patrol cutter (OPC), the Argus, the company said in a release.

The April 28 ceremony, at Eastern Shipbuilding's Nelson Street facility in Panama City, was performed and recorded without an audience to comply with U.S. Centers for Disease Control guidelines for combatting the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The keel-laying represents the ceremonial start of a ship's life by commemorating the assembly of the initial modular construction units. Historically, to attest that the keel was properly laid and of excellent quality, the shipbuilder would carve their initials into it. This practice is commemorated by welding the initials of the ship's sponsor into the keel authentication plate.

The ship's sponsor is retired Coast Guard Capt. Beverly Kelley, who was the first woman to command a U.S. military vessel. She commanded the 95-foot patrol boat, the cutter Cape Newagen, in 1979. Throughout her distinguished career, she became the first woman to command both a medium-endurance cutter and a high-endurance cutter in cutters Northland and Boutwell, respectively.

"Eastern Shipbuilding Group is humbled and proud to have been chosen to build this next-generation ship for the world's best

Coast Guard, and we think today represents a milestone that all those involved in the program can be proud of," said Eastern's president, Joey D'Isernia.

"The steel joined here today is unlike any you or I have seen before. This steel has been ravaged by 162 mph winds, generated by the third most powerful hurricane to make landfall in this country's history. This steel has borne witness to a pandemic that has caused fear and shaken our core. But through all this, it remains sturdy, it remains resilient, and today it will join with other steel to become stronger, more defined and more resolute. Today is representative of how we build, and of unwavering resolve in the face of adversity for a Coast Guard and a nation that deserves nothing less."



Adm. Charles W. Ray, vice commandant of the Coast Guard, tours the construction of the first offshore patrol cutter, the Argus, in 2019 at the Eastern Shipbuilding Group shipyard in Panama City, Florida. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Loumania Stewart

D'Isernia was accompanied on the podium by Capt. Andrew Meverden, representing the Coast Guard, and Bradley Remick, the welder charged with fashioning the sponsor's initials onto the ceremonial keel authentication plate.

The OPC will provide a capability bridge between the national security cutter, which patrols the demanding open ocean, and the fast-response cutter, which serves closer to shore. The OPC design includes the capability of carrying an MH-60 or MH-65 helicopter and three operational over-the-horizon small boats. The vessel also is equipped with a highly sophisticated combat system and C4ISR suite.