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### **Stellwagen Bank sanctuary volunteer honored with national award**

Ron Armonath, a Sagamore Beach resident who helped organize a citizen science project that collects information about whale activities at Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, was named National Volunteer of the Year by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.

A member of the Massachusetts Coast Guard Auxiliary, Armonath has spent more than 1,000 hours of his time recruiting, training and managing a team of volunteers. The team works with local whale watch operators to collect data used to understand and manage vessel traffic around the marine mammals that live in the sanctuary. Data compiled by Armonath's team also has been used to analyze noise levels in the sanctuary and how sound may be affecting marine mammals.

"The sanctuary is indebted to Ron and his contingent of trained observers, many of whom are retired Coast Guard personnel, who provide the sanctuary with a wealth of information from hundreds of hours of voluntary at-sea duty each year," said Craig MacDonald, sanctuary superintendent. "We were especially pleased to see that our sanctuary's selection as volunteer of the year was chosen for the highest national honor at the foundation."

The sanctuary observer program is part of a growing array of volunteer opportunities at Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, ranging from Student Ambassadors to Seabird Stewards. For more information about sanctuary volunteer programs, visit <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/involved/volunteers.html>.

Armonath received the award at the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Leadership Awards Dinner last month in Washington, D.C. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is a private, non-profit organization that assists national marine sanctuaries with education and outreach programs designed to preserve, protect and promote meaningful opportunities for public interaction with these special places in the ocean and Great Lakes.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary encompasses 842 square miles of ocean, stretching between Cape Ann and Cape Cod offshore of Massachusetts. Renowned for its biological diversity and remarkable productivity, the sanctuary is famous as a whale watching destination and supports a rich assortment of marine life, including marine mammals, seabirds, fishes and marine invertebrates. The sanctuary's position astride the historic shipping routes and fishing grounds for Massachusetts' oldest ports also makes it a repository for shipwrecks representing several hundred years of maritime transportation.

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**On the Web:**

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation: <http://www.nmsfocean.org>

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