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Press Release

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[Bridges & Tunnels](#)

IMMEDIATE

MTA Bridges and Tunnels Celebrates 50 Years of Service At Verrazano-Narrows Bridge

MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast along with MTA Bridges and Tunnels officials celebrated the anniversary of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge today, 50 years to the day after it first opened, at a ceremony complete with a 50-gun salute and a fireboat water display with the bridge itself serving as a spectacular backdrop.

The event, held at the Overlook inside the National Park Service's Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, was attended by several hundred invited guests with many more watching and listening to the displays from Von Briesen Park in Staten Island and Shore Road in Brooklyn.

The bridge, which is 4,260 feet from tower to tower and links Staten Island and Brooklyn, opened to traffic on Nov. 21, 1964. In its first full year of operation, 17.6 million vehicles crossed the span. The architect of the bridge, Othmar Ammann, also built the Triborough (now Robert F. Kennedy), Bronx-Whitestone, Throgs Neck, George Washington, Bayonne, Goethals and Outerbridge Crossing bridges.

"Fifty years after it opened, the longest vehicular suspension bridge in the United States, remains an incredible achievement of engineering and architecture," said MTA Chairman Prendergast. "It takes a lot of work to keep a bridge that handles more than 180,000 vehicles daily safe and in good shape. That's why we spent more than \$540 million in capital improvements at the Verrazano-Narrows alone in the last Capital Program, and another \$431 million is proposed in the 2015-2019 Capital Program. This bridge is proof that smart investments in infrastructure can make a difference in a city, a state and even a nation."

"The Verrazano-Narrows Bridge was envisioned to be a key link in a new interstate highway system, and it is, but it also ended up transforming the city by providing a physical link between Staten Island and the other four boroughs for the first time," said MTA Bridges and Tunnels President James Ferrara. "Today we are celebrating the bridge's first 50 years and are looking forward to the next 50 as MTA Bridges and Tunnels continues to ensure the bridge remains strong and safe for the more than 65 million customers who use it annually."

The event included a performance by Staten Island's P.S. 22 Fifth Grade Chorus, the official unveiling of the United States Post Office's 50th anniversary commemorative priority mail stamp, comments by MTA Bridges and Tunnels Vice President and Chief Engineer Joe Keane, and unveiling of a plaque dedicated to the workers and bridge builders, past and present, which will hang in the Verrazano-Narrows administration building. MTA Bridges and Tunnels Executive Vice President and Chief of Operations James Fortunato, who began his 33-year-career at the Verrazano-Narrows, acted as host of the event.

Others in attendance included MTA Bridges and Tunnels Vice President of Operations Patrick Parisi, MTA Board members Allen P. Cappelli and Charles G. Moerdler, union leaders from the Bridge and Tunnel Officers Association, Superior Officers Benevolent Association, and District Council 37, Local 1931 Maintenance workers.

Several retired Bridge and Tunnel Officers, assigned to the bridge on opening day 50 years ago, also attended along with several engineers and iron workers who helped build the bridge, author Gay Talese, who wrote *The Bridge*, and several of the posse of young men who waited six days and were the first to cross the bridge from Staten Island in a 1959 Cadillac convertible.

At the close of the ceremonies, attendees donned ear plugs and were treated to a 50-gun salute – 25 shots fired by Howitzer cannons from each side of the bridge – by the New York State Veterans Corp of Artillery and a red-white-and-blue fireboat display in New York Harbor by the Fire Department of New York.

To celebrate the anniversary, MTA Bridges and Tunnels is also curating exhibits of historic photographs from the MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive at the New York City Transit Museum in Brooklyn and at Historic Richmond in Staten Island. School children from P.S. 185 in Bay Ridge and District 75's P373-K in Brooklyn also worked on art projects, drawing and photographing the bridge, which will be displayed at the Verrazano-Narrows administration building.

And just in time for the 50th anniversary, the New York City Department of Parks completed restoration of the Verrazano Memorial flagstaff at John Carty Park at Fort Hamilton Parkway and 95th Street. The Park's Department's Art & Antiquities Monument's unit, cleaned and refinished the memorial's stonework, and installed a replica of the bronze sculpted relief of the bridge's namesake, Giovanni da Verrazano. The original was stolen in the early 1980s.

The Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, which is overseen by Director of Bridges South William McCann, includes about 100 maintenance and operation personnel responsible for day-to-day operations at the bridge. Facility Engineer David Riggs oversees about 10 on site Engineering and Construction employees, who oversee Capital design and construction projects and help keep the bridge in a state of good repair.

For historic photos click [here](#). Please credit MTA Bridges and Tunnels Special Archive.

To view an MTA You Tube video about the bridge go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkDr7rRgl2M&feature=youtu.be>

For information about the history of the bridge and fun facts [click here](#) or go to www.mta.info