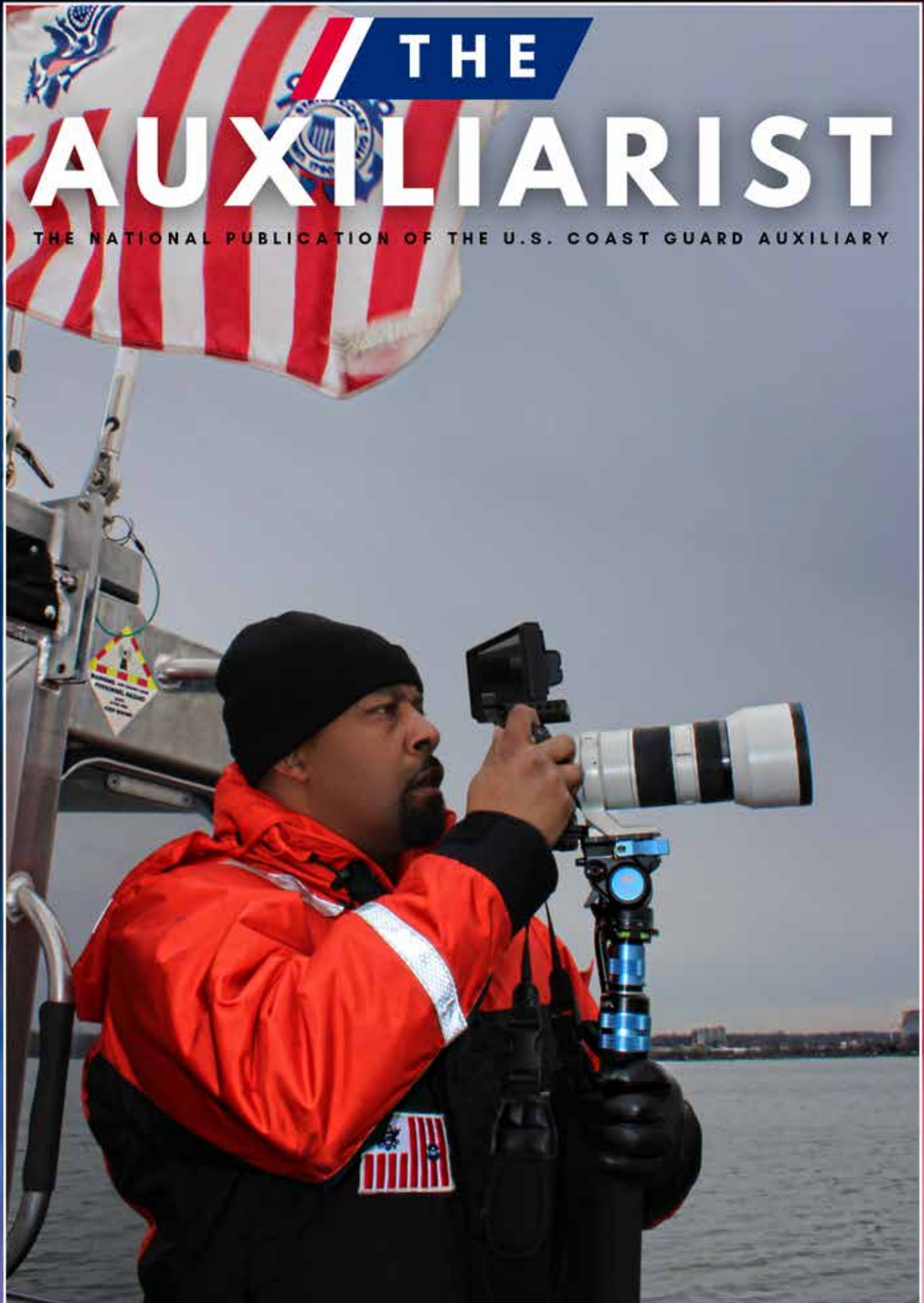


FIRST QUARTER | 2025

# THE AUXILIARIST

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY





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## The Power and Benefits of Member Engagement

By COMO Jim Losi, District Commodore, D11N

Consider the immense benefits and power that come from actively engaging not only with the boating public but also with our dedicated active-duty U.S. Coast Guard partners.

By fostering these connections, we not only strengthen our community ties but also enhance our operational effectiveness. Working hand-in-hand with our active-duty counterparts allows us to share knowledge, resources, and support, ultimately making our missions more successful and our waters safer.

Additionally, engaging more deeply with our active-duty partners offers significant benefits to our Auxiliary membership. It provides our members with opportunities to expand their portfolios of activities, gain valuable experience, and develop new skills. These engagements can lead to a more enriched and fulfilling experience for our members, while also contributing to the overall success of our missions.

Furthermore, by demonstrating our commitment and reliability, we can improve the value of our U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary men and women, while also enhancing our reputation among active-duty members as a trusted partner. This trust and mutual respect are crucial for our continued success and collaboration.

Let's continue to build these vital relationships and leverage the collective strength of our team. Together, we can achieve even greater heights in service and dedication.

Your unwavering commitment and leadership is vital to our success.



## RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY

The Auxiliary's most prominent role is promoting Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) among the general public. The Auxiliary has several distinct programs that support this mission. Providing free Vessel Safety Exams to recreational boaters is one of the Auxiliary's longest-running and most visible activities.



# HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**T**oday's U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, with nearly 20,000 men and women, is a unique force that carries out an array of responsibilities touching almost every facet of the U.S. maritime environment. The Coast Guard's motto is Semper Paratus, meaning Always Ready.

The overarching mission of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is to contribute to the safety and security of our citizens, ports, waterways, and coastal regions.

The Auxiliary balances the missions of Recreational Boating Safety and Coast Guard Support with Maritime Homeland Security and other challenges that emerge due to our growing understanding of changes in the post-9/11 era.

Since 1939, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary has safeguarded our nation's maritime interests in the heartland, ports, at sea, and around the globe. Members from all walks of life bring their training and experience as a member of the uniformed volunteer component of the United States Coast Guard.

## U.S. COAST GUARD FORCE MULTIPLIERS

The Auxiliary augments the Coast Guard's vital role as the nation's guardian agency ensuring the safety and environmental protection of our nation's precious waterway resources. As America's Volunteer Guardians, we are committed to being dedicated, vigilant, and ready to engage this mission on behalf of our fellow citizens.



**PROUD TRADITIONS  
WORTHY  
MISSIONS**



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# On the Potomac River, Auxiliarists Support Sector Maryland–NCR's Incident Response

by John Mietus, DIR-AdS, A-Directorate

A klaxon blared as massive hangar doors closed at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Inside, a parked airplane shared its hangar with dozens of strangers. Some wore badges or jackets with an alphabet soup of letters. Others wore Army or Navy uniforms. Many wore Coast Guard blue, among them four volunteers.

The hangar housed a hub for the response to the "Potomac River Aviation Incident." No name could fully capture the tragedy of the 67 lives lost on January 29, 2025. That night, American/PSA Airlines Flight 5342 and a U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter collided over the river.

Inside the hangar, specially trained personnel managed the complex task of searching for and recovering victims and then removing the wreckage. The Coast Guard, a leader in the development of the National Incident Management System, provided several dozen people to assist other branches of service and federal, state, as well as local agencies. Coast Guard small boats and cutters also enforced a maritime safety zone around the wreckage.

Surprisingly, many of the Coast Guard personnel in the hangar had worked together on another incident that occurred just ten months earlier and a short drive north. On March 26, 2024, Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed, claiming six lives and closing that city's port.

Both incidents occurred in navigable waters for which Coast Guard Sector Maryland–National Capital Region is responsible. The Sector also leads the Coast Guard response to National Special Security Events that occur in Washington, D.C. In just the first month of 2025, that responsibility added three more events, including the Presidential Inauguration, to the Sector's incident management workload.

In the hangar, at folding tables marked "JIC" for Joint Information Center, several Team Coast Guard responders checked in each morning. Some of their public affairs colleagues in the JIC might have noticed subtle differences in their appearance. The extra word "Auxiliary" on their Operational Dress Uniforms. White lettering rather than gold on caps. Non-regulation but neatly trimmed facial hair.

They were local members of the 85-year-old, volunteer Coast Guard Auxiliary. Their role was to assist Coast Guard public affairs specialists during the response.

Hector "Rick" Corrales is a career public affairs specialist with a military background. He is qualified as an Advanced Public Information Officer (PIO). PIOs communicate with the public on behalf of emergency responders. At the Key Bridge, Rick first worked in the JIC and later managed it.

After the Key Bridge response, Coast Guard and Auxiliary leaders agreed with Rick that Auxiliarists should train as PIOs for future incidents. Rick then qualified to teach the Basic PIO course. His first class, also the Auxiliary's first, included three Auxiliarists from Maryland and the District of Columbia. When Rick became the Auxiliary's national public affairs director, the three joined his staff.

Rick had just finished supporting other Coast Guard events in Washington when he was recalled to assist the Coast Guard at the Potomac JIC. It was time to bring in the three PIO-trained Auxiliarists as JIC "Field Specialists."

Jamal Lee photographed the Coast Guard small boat crews enforcing the Potomac safety zone, just as he did during the Inauguration. Last year, he and Rick flew to South Carolina to provide a live video feed of the Coast Guard's Marine Board of Investigation into the Titan Submersible disaster.



Flight paths of incoming commuter jet American/PSA Airlines Flight 5342 (light blue) and U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter (brown) on a training mission. Image: National Transportation Safety Bureau.

Julius Jackson also photographed the Potomac response. Like Rick and Jamal, he had supported the Coast Guard in Washington earlier that month.

John Mietus prepared written material at the JIC. At the Key Bridge response, he was part of an Auxiliary team

who staffed the Incident Command Post entrance for several weeks.

The cascade of large incident responses in Sector Maryland-NCR was unusual, and Auxiliary support to the Potomac JIC even more so. But Auxiliarists turn out daily across the country to directly support the active-duty and reserve Coast Guard on everyday tasks.

In Sector Maryland–NCR, a small group of dedicated Auxiliarists volunteer to work in specialized roles that are a matter of routine for Coast Guard personnel. As CDR Caren Damon, deputy Sector commander, explained, "We rely on the Auxiliary to promote recreational boating safety. But we're also glad Auxiliarists work alongside us at the Port of Baltimore and across the Chesapeake Bay. They're an immediate force multiplier."

For example, in that Sector Auxiliarists help inspect seagoing containers and commercial fishing vessels. They stand communications watches and cook for crews at small boat stations and on cutters. Auxiliarists nationwide crew vessels and operate radios; but in Sector MD-NCR and several other sectors, Auxiliarists also crew private aircraft under Coast Guard orders. In winter, they might report ice forming below them in the northern Chesapeake Bay. The next summer, they might fly the same route to introduce Aids to Navigation personnel to a newly assigned area. Newer direct support roles for the Auxiliary include cybersecurity and chaplain support.

"Demobilizing" from the incident response, Rick, Jamal, Julius, and John reflected on their new on-the-job experience. They'll see each other again soon at other Auxiliary activities. And all agreed with a sentiment Rick expressed: "Hopefully there will never be another tragedy like this in our area, but we'll keep training to respond." *Semper Paratus.*

Commercial contractors salvage the remains of the commuter jet from the Potomac River. Photo by U.S. Coast Guard.



Hector Corrales, DIR-A, AUXPA1, Lead, Auxiliary Public Affairs Augmentation Team



Public Affairs National staff member Julius Jackson photo documenting cooperative efforts during the incident. Photo by Auxiliarist Jamal Lee.

John Mietus providing valued augmentation at the Potomac River Aviation Incident Joint Information Center. Photo by AUX Jamal Lee.





Across the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the spectrum of unit vitality is striking. Some flotillas are thriving, bursting with energy and achievement, while others struggle to stay afloat, or worse, are sinking. We operate within the same national framework, often in similar geographic areas, and draw from largely the same demographics. This begs the question: What accounts for such a dramatic divergence in outcomes? It's led me to ponder the nature of the conversations within flotillas at these opposite ends of the spectrum – to imagine being a proverbial fly on the wall. It strikes me that while our fundamental missions and shared desire to serve are likely similar, there must be a critical difference in how we communicate.

What characterizes the discussions within a flourishing flotilla? I don't claim to have the complete picture yet. However, I strongly suspect that a deep dedication to purpose plays a significant role. Imagine if most conversations within such a unit were laser-focused on advancing our missions and objectives. That, I believe, would be a game-changer. What if, at the outset of every discussion, we collectively asked: "Does this contribute to our forward momentum?" And what if, when a discussion veered off course, we consciously redirected it toward something more productive? Envision the exponential increase in a unit's effectiveness. Once this kind of forward-thinking dialogue becomes ingrained, it would be difficult to dislodge. Constructive, positive, and productive communication would naturally displace negativity. I, for one, would be thrilled to be part of such a flotilla. I imagine it wouldn't just be highly effective and a great place to belong, but genuinely enjoyable. In fact, I believe many others would find real satisfaction in contributing to such a positive and impactful environment.

# A Major Wondering...

By K.C. Murphy, BC-AME

When our discussions are truly engaged and forward-focused, the possibilities become limitless, and the need to dwell on negativity diminishes. Problems transform into opportunities for positive change. Complaints evolve into challenges to be overcome. Challenges, in turn, become accomplishments. And ultimately, these accomplishments define our collective success, a success that naturally fosters more success. This fundamental shift in our dialogue doesn't happen passively; it requires a conscious commitment, and the beauty of it is that this positive momentum has no natural endpoint.

Consider this. Try it within your own unit. Make a deliberate effort to ensure every discussion meets the primary criterion of propelling us forward, and observe the profound difference it makes. Then, actively engage others in a conversation about the power of these forward-leaning discussions. Whether your unit is currently riding high or facing headwinds, making every discussion a step forward can be transformative.

Here's a simple, actionable request: As you conclude each unit meeting, ask, "Did this meeting achieve the goal of moving us forward?" Document the answer in your minutes to track the evolution – or lack thereof – of your discussions. Without this kind of self-assessment, we have no reliable way to chart our course and ensure we're heading in the right direction.



The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary has introduced a revolutionary 12-month course aimed at equipping appointed directors and deputy directors with the leadership and imperative operational skills necessary for their pivotal roles. This program called the Senior Auxiliary National Directors Advanced Leadership course, with the acronym SANDAL, is being hailed as a transformative initiative, combines hands-on learning, advanced leadership training, and a deep dive into the unique challenges of leading a directorate.

Commodore Todd Monis, Assistant National Commodore of FORCECOM and one of three senior instructors of the course, encapsulated the significance of this initiative, stating, "This course is imperative as we grow as an Auxiliary but also grow our leaders for the future." His words underscore the long-term vision of fostering capable leaders who will guide the Auxiliary in achieving its strategic objectives.

This inaugural course marks a significant shift in the approach to leadership development within the Auxiliary. Traditionally, directors and deputy directors relied on lower-level leadership courses and informal mentorship to navigate their roles. However, the new program ensures that every appointed National Directorate leader is fully prepared to manage their responsibilities effectively, fostering a more cohesive and efficient organization while also creating groundbreaking initiatives and supporting the National Commodore's strategic plan. The program is also designed to address inter-agency collaboration within the directorates as well as between National staff and the Districts.

At the core of the curriculum is a series of interactive modules focusing on leadership strategies, communication skills, and specific operational planning related to their individual directorates. Participants engage in simulations that mirror real-world scenarios, allowing them to hone their decision-making abilities in high-pressure environments. This experiential approach ensures that directors and deputy directors can lead with confidence, even during critical decisions and missions. Additionally, the program emphasizes soft skills such as conflict resolution and team building, which are essential for managing diverse teams of volunteers.

## A Groundbreaking Course for USCG Auxiliary Leadership:

## Transforming Directors and Deputy Directors in Just 12 Months

by Barry Denton, ANACO-FCd, AUXPA1

Another standout feature of the course is its integration of cutting-edge technology and digital tools. From advanced directorate planning for not just a successful term but in transition planning to virtual reality simulations for crisis management, the program equips leaders with the tools they need to operate in the modern Auxiliary landscape. The program also includes mentorship from seasoned Auxiliary leaders as well as Coast Guard personnel, providing participants with invaluable insights and guidance. Regular monthly workshops and networking opportunities allow directors and deputy directors the ability to build career-long connections, share best practices, and learn from one another. This collaborative environment fosters a sense of community and shared purpose, strengthening the organization as a whole.

Perhaps the most groundbreaking aspect of the program is its adaptability. Recognizing that each directorate has unique challenges and needs, the course includes customizable components tailored to specific needs for each director and deputy director. This ensures that directors and deputy directors are equipped with the knowledge and skills most relevant to their operational areas of concern, whether that involves managing large-scale national impacting initiatives or addressing directorate-focused decisions.

As the first cohort of directors and deputy directors embark on this 12-month journey, the impact of this program is already evident. Feedback from participants highlights the comprehensive nature of the training and its immediate applicability to their roles. By investing in the development of its leadership, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is not only enhancing its operational capacity but also reinforcing its commitment to safeguarding the nation's waterways and supporting its volunteers. This innovative course is set to become a benchmark for leadership training as the Training Directorate continues to look to the future.







# Coast Guard Auxiliary Lends a Hand: Supporting Safety & Success at the New York City Marathon

By Christopher Orlando, AUXPA1

**For the 2024 New York City Marathon (NYCM), over 53,000 runners representing over 150 countries converged on U.S. Coast Guard Sector New York & Fort Wadsworth. An event this size and magnitude calls for planning, teamwork and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.**

According to District Captain SECNY North (e) and Auxiliary Project Officer for the NYCM, David Mooney, "The Auxiliary was a true force multiplier for this event. Every year thousands of runners travel to run in the NYCM and it all starts on the grounds of USCG Sector New York."

Mooney said, "Our primary mission is the safety and security of the sector buildings and personnel while the runners transit through the area to begin their 26.2 mile journey. We also provide a Communications team, Culinary Assistants, EMTs and Public Affairs Specialists for the event."

Mooney, who has been Auxiliary Project Officer since 2017, said, "It is my job to make sure everyone has the most up-to-date and detailed information for the mission including logistics, base access, communications, culinary, and more."

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary had 79 members who assisted as shuttle drivers, AUXCAs, EMTs, and a force multiplier for general security tasks assisting Coast Guard Security Forces, according to Michael S. Klacik, then District Commodore - elect (DCO (E)) of United States Coast Guard Auxiliary First District-Southern Region (D1SR).



"My role as the current District Chief of Staff is to support Mooney and make sure he has everything he needs to increase the number of Auxiliarists participating in the event," said Klacik. "I work to promote the event by spreading the message to our members, that this is a fantastic way to help augment the Coast Guard and other government agencies present to provide a safe, fun environment for the 53,000+ runners."

The day starts early for members assisting with this event, especially Mooney. "The days leading up to race day are hours upon hours of planning, last minute fixes, emails, phone calls, walkthroughs. I dedicate my time to make sure everything is flawless and perfect. More importantly, it's my job to make sure everyone traveling to work this event can get there safely and without issue."

He continued, "I arrive just after the two-hour Security Sweep is done and I make sure all our shuttle vans are up and running. Between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. the Auxiliary Culinary Assistants (AUXCA) arrive and head to the galley to begin to prepare breakfast. By 4:00 a.m. all personnel, Auxiliary and Active Duty must be on base as they shut down vehicle traffic. Breakfast starts at 4:30 a.m. and the intel briefing starts at 5:00 a.m. All Auxiliarists are assigned posts and arrive at their assignments by 5:30 a.m."

"The hours were grueling, but the payoff of smiling first responders and Auxiliary coming for a hot meal was best" said AUX Bert Ongkeo, an Auxiliary Culinary Assistant and Flotilla Commander for Lower Manhattan Flotilla, who worked at the NYCM. "In New York, we have a chief who is willing to assist us in training our culinary members at Station New York. Consequently, our opportunity to work in an active-duty galley is now available for the Auxiliary. The more we can recruit and train, the more we can send our members to be part of the action."

And they're off! The next wave of runners starts the Marathon, leaving the grounds at Sector NY and transiting over the Verrazzano Bridge. Photo by Sandro Sherrod, AUXPA3.

Captain J. Anderchick, Commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector New York, giving remarks during the NYCM Safety and Security Briefing. Photo by Sandro Sherrod, AUXPA3.

Mooney said that the success of the event comes down to planning. "Planning officially starts the day after the marathon as the New York Road Runners who manage the Marathon always announce the date for next year's race. By June whispers of the Marathon begin and once September hits we begin bi-weekly meetings. It takes weeks to plan our logistics and by the time October hits we have begun to form a duty roster. Requests for Duty close one week prior to the Marathon and during that time we create post assignments and send out detailed instructions."

AUX Ongkeo explained that partnership with the active duty Coast Guard really makes this event a success. "This year, most of the prep was helped by the Active Duty culinary services team. They prepped the bacon, sausages on a sheet pan, and supplied us with eggs in a 16-quart Cambro container. Our AUXCA members made the pancake mix, the potato hash, and cooked the rest of the prepped items. As for lunch, we marinated the chicken, roasted the vegetables, and fried the potatoes."

"This year was one of the smoothest-running events that I have participated in during my 17 years in the Auxiliary. The team of Auxiliarists that showed up, some starting before midnight on November 2nd and working through noon on November 3rd are truly phenomenal, and I am proud to call them shipmates," said Klacik, DCO (E), via an email to participants. "This all with the added benefit of having to deal with the time change. This year was extra special because we had members from both D1SR and D5NR take time out of their lives to come and assist us in making this massive event safe, fun and a success."

"I'd like to commend the four D5NR Auxiliarists who participated in the New York City Marathon mission in D1SR," said Noreen Schifini, DCO (E) for U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Fifth District Northern Region. "We have a great relationship with our shipmates in D1SR and we were honored to assist with such an important event. We look forward to continuing that partnership in service of Team Coast Guard."



Sector New York Command, Captain J. Anderchik, Deputy Sector Commander Captain D. McCarthy and Command Master Chief D. Phillips onboard a 45 RBM under the Verrazzano Bridge. Photo by Sandro Sherrod, AUXPA3.





AUX Larry Nolan from D5NR Division 7 said, “It was a unique experience based on the size and scale of the facilities, support and security personnel needed to safely and efficiently allow 53,000 runners to start the race over a three-hour period. There were rows of approximately 50 portable toilets on block after block to give a sense of the scale. The teamwork and camaraderie among the approximately 100 active Coast Guard members and Auxiliarists was at a high level and allowed for a pleasant experience. The careful planning and processes were evident as the coordination and performance of the team was excellent. It was a one-of-a-kind experience that will remain a memorable one.”

Mooney said, "Over the years I have personally spoken with Chiefs, Captains, Admirals, and they all say the same thing, this event could not succeed without the help of the Auxiliary. The Auxiliary members that volunteer for this event triple the amount of Active Duty personnel assigned for the event. A true force multiplier."

"The First District Southern Region has approximately 2,600+ Auxiliarists serving three Coast Guard Sectors. This event allowed us to be visible to 53,000+ runners from around the world, who may never have heard of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Our presence initiated a lot of conversation between our members and the runners, and neither group were shy in engaging in conversation promoting not only what we do, but what led them to be participating in running the famous NYCM," said DCO (E) Klacik. "As for the gold side, it may be the first time they really ever worked with the Auxiliary, and it is a great educational experience for both them and us. They get to observe the Auxiliary in action and hopefully see the benefit of working together to build a stronger team."



AUXCA Kathada "Bert" Ongkeo serving breakfast to arriving Auxiliaries at 0400. Photo by Sandro Sherrod. AUXPA3.



The 2024 New York City Marathon  
Auxiliary Culinary Assistance Team.  
Photo by Sandro Sherrod, AUXPA3.



The Senior Leadership Team making their rounds checking on Auxiliaries on Post. LtoR Michael Raffel, DCOS(e), David Mooney DCAPT SECNY North (e), Michael Klacik, DCO(e), Sherry Kisver, DDC-Logistics, and Steven Kisver. Photo: Sandro Sherrod. AUXPA3.



Auxiliarists from City Island Flotilla 05-04 man the Main Gate post which is a vital security checkpoint into the Blue Village for runners.

Photo By Sandro Sherrod, AUXPA3.



The 2024 USCG New York City Marathon Safety and Security Team made up of Active Duty, Reservists, Auxiliary, USCG SECNY Security Forces, USCG K9 and MSST. Photo by Auxiliarist David Mooney.





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# A Lifetime of Service: A Volunteer's Journey to Honorary Coast Guard Chief

By Petty Officer Third Class Christine Bills

A cloudless sky and crisp late-January air surrounded the crew of Coast Guard Station Emerald Isle during a ceremony celebrating Petty Officer First Class Kyle Vaders, the station's executive petty officer, who advanced to the rank of chief. While the crew and the audience harbored a secret, there was one person attending who had no idea what was about to occur.

Susan Stepputtis, a volunteer with the Coast Guard Auxiliary, stood at the position of attention alongside the station crew, when suddenly, she heard her own name. Masking her confusion and shock, Stepputtis remained stoic as Chief Petty Officer Kenneth MacDougall, the officer in charge assigned to Station Emerald Isle, announced that she was being honorably advanced to the rank of chief.

"When the chief called out my name, I literally didn't know what to do," said Stepputtis. "I couldn't believe it – it was a complete shock. I had no idea whatsoever this was going to happen."

MacDougall said that Stepputtis' exemplary service and unwavering commitment made her an outstanding candidate for becoming an honorary chief.

"Some people volunteer their time and talent, embodying the guiding principles of a chief: compassion, heritage, integrity, expertise and flexibility," said MacDougall. "I'm thankful that we have a way to recognize those that naturally live by those principles, and I'm proud to serve with and welcome Ms. Susan to the Chief's Mess."

Since March 2018, Stepputtis has volunteered extensively within the military community. She has participated in 390 events, completed more than 2,000 volunteer hours and engaged in more than 44,000 personal interactions.

Her contributions span across multiple military installations, such as Camp Devil Dog, Camp Lejeune, the USO of North Carolina – Jacksonville, in addition to Station Emerald Isle and various others.

*Petty Officer First Class Kyle Vaders, an executive petty officer assigned to Station Emerald Isle who advanced to the rank of chief, and the surprise recognition of AUX Susan Stepputtis to honorary chief. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christine Bills*

"I've always been patriotic," Stepputtis said. "My dad served in the Navy during World War II in the Philippines, and I was raised to be patriotic and respect the military. If I had one regret, it was that when I was young enough to actually do something about it, I did not join the military."

Stepputtis supported deploying troops by participating in pre-deployment briefings and assisted returning service members and their families by delivering 400 bags of cookies. She also took part in swearing-in ceremonies, supported wounded warriors through events like the Marine Corps Trials and the Wounded Warrior Resource Fair, and distributed more than 128 birthday cakes to military personnel.

Stepputtis continued her volunteer service by packaging 500 candy "Pots O' Gold" for St. Patrick's Day, serving 9,000 people at Thanksgiving dinners, and organizing Super Bowl parties and health fairs. She participated in three Warrior Battalion Breakfasts, 17 No-Dough Dinners, and two Food Box Giveaways. She also worked with children by leading 30 story time sessions and coordinating two Back-to-School Bashes.

MacDougall said that despite facing personal challenges, Stepputtis' dedication never wavered, even after she broke her leg. Despite being confined to a wheelchair, she continued volunteering and delivered birthday cakes to military service members.



During her time serving with the USO, Stepputtis was awarded the President's Silver Volunteer Pin from President Donald Trump, Volunteer of the Quarter from the USO State of North Carolina and Volunteer of the Year from the USO Coastal Region North Carolina.

Stepputtis said she loves serving the men and women of the military and believes it is her purpose in life. This made the coronavirus pandemic particularly difficult for her.

"The 18-month hiatus from working with and serving the military due to the coronavirus was one of the lowest points in my life," stated Stepputtis. "Even though I had many accomplishments in my life, nothing provided the joy that I felt when serving our military."

When the coronavirus restrictions were lifted, Stepputtis joined the Auxiliary in March 2023, and became a watchstander at Station Emerald Isle. She logged more than 1,000 hours, assisted during personnel shortages and aided in training new crewmembers at the station.

"One of the fondest memories for me is how the crew has just folded their arms around me and just made me feel so welcome here," she said. "Many times, they'll say 'oh come on, Ms. Susan, you're part of the crew.' They include me in that, and it's been so wonderful."

Stepputtis said she wanted to improve her ability to provide spiritual and emotional support to the crew, so she began participating in various chaplain events, including marriage retreats. Despite already having a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in business administration, she also went back to school to earn an associate of arts degree in ministerial studies.

"I currently hold a chapel service for the crew at Station Emerald Isle every Sunday," said Stepputtis. "Even though participation is optional, we have 100% attendance from the crew on duty."

MacDougall said her efforts have been instrumental in fostering a supportive environment for military personnel and illustrate her comprehensive commitment to all facets of military life.

"Susan Stepputtis' dedication, compassion and tireless efforts have made an indelible mark on the military



*Clockwise from top left: The crew, Sector North Carolina Chief's Mess, and several Fifth District leaders gathered for an advancement ceremony for Petty Officer First Class Kyle Vaders, and Auxiliarist Susan Stepputtis to honorary chief. Susan and Rick Stepputtis, U.S. Coast Guard photos by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christine Bills.*

community," said MacDougall. "She has not only significantly enhanced the lives and morale of the men and women of the Coast Guard, but every military member and family that she has in her reach, despite their branch of service."

Stepputtis recently earned the Volunteer of the Year Award from the Coast Guard Auxiliary Swansboro Flotilla 054-20-10 and continues to serve six days a week at Station Emerald Isle.

As the advancement ceremony came to a close, Stepputtis was surrounded by the station's crew and her husband of 47 years, Rick, who had a smile on his face as he looked at his wife and listened to all she had accomplished.

"Susan's service record is nothing short of extraordinary," MacDougall said. "Her volunteer work, spanning from March 2018 to the present, is a testament to her unwavering commitment and exceptional contributions to the Marines, Coast Guard, Navy, Army and Air Force, as well as their families."



# How to Plan a Safe Boating Event

## A Step-by-Step Guide to Hosting a Water Safety Event

Article & Photos by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2



SAUSALITO, Calif. — U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliarist Tiffany Townsend supports a Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter static display tour during at Coast Guard Station Golden Gate. In recognition of National Safe Boating Week, the annual Water Safety Fair promotes safety as the summer recreational boating season begins. Auxiliary photo by Pete Gorenberg.

*Note: While at an Air Station or in a helicopter landing zone, it is appropriate to NOT wear a cover, which may fly off from the rotor wash.*

As a kick-off event for the summer boating season, a Water Safety Fair provides an excellent opportunity for the public and the media to learn about safe boating practices from local first responders. Attractions may include educational displays, boat tours, rescue demonstration observations, clean boating kits, life jacket giveaways, and engaging hands-on activities such as knot-tying and heaving line practice. Auxiliarists can provide information about boating safety courses, proper marine radio communications, how to obtain vessel safety checks (VSCs), and the importance of safety equipment. This family-friendly event can offer great exposure for your local Coast Guard unit, serving as an open house for the station. A Water Safety Fair is also a prime opportunity for Coast Guard Auxiliary member recruitment.

**Planning** begins with identifying your target audience, conducting media outreach, and crafting the message to be shared. In this case, your target audience is the recreational boating public and their families. Your media outreach may include social media, newspapers, local public television, yacht club newsletters, and neighborhood event calendars. The message will be focused on water safety, particularly the importance of wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) whenever on or near the water.

**Above:** Flyer for the 2025 Water Safety Fair at U.S.C.G. Station Golden Gate, an event celebrating National Safe Boating Week on the San Francisco Bay. Auxiliary graphic by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2.

Wearing a life jacket is essential for reducing the risk of drowning after falling overboard or from the dock. “Approximately 70% of all boating fatalities are drownings, and most of those fatalities could have been avoided,” states the National Safe Boating Council. “Ninety percent of drowning victims are not wearing a PFD—drownings are rare when boaters are wearing an appropriate PFD.”

**Execution** requires sufficient time to put your plan into action. The Water Safety Fair should be a key topic on the agenda at your first meeting of the year, with the unit’s vice commander typically serving as event chair. A monthly checklist can be a planning guide, helping break down tasks into manageable parts. This list will continually evolve as your Auxiliary unit learns from prior events. Best practices are learned over time and through collaboration.

**Analysis** is necessary to determine the event’s effectiveness in supporting our recreational boating safety while advancing the Auxiliary Public Affairs program. At the welcome desk – or at individual booths - Auxiliary volunteers can collect attendee information. This documents the number of attendees, the number of PFDs distributed, and how guests learned about the event. Contact information is collected from those requesting VSCs, boating course information, and from individuals interested in joining the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

**Right:** Water Safety Fair Sign: Printing reusable signs for posting in high-traffic areas during the week of your event is impactful and cost-effective. Discounts are available through the Coast Guard Auxiliary Assoc. Auxiliary graphic by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2.

**National Safe Boating Week**

**WATER SAFETY FAIR**

Saturday 10AM to 1PM

**U.S. Coast Guard Station Golden Gate**

435 Murray Circle  
Fort Baker, Sausalito

**Fun & FREE Family Event!**

Boat Tours

Life Jacket Giveaway

Marine Radio Practice

Helicopter Rescue Demo

Fire Fighters & First Responders

Knot Tying & Line Heaving

Search & Rescue Dogs

Puddle Craft Safety

Clean Boating Kits

Coastie the Robot

Plenty of Parking

**Follow-up** identifies opportunities for program improvement and facilitates event replication by future planners. This starts with debriefing event volunteers, either in person or through an emailed survey, to streamline future Water Safety Fair planning. Impressions and suggestions are gathered early while they are still fresh. Visitors requesting information on VSCs, boating safety courses, or how to join the Auxiliary are contacted by email the day after the event. Send thank-you notes—including a request for feedback—to key partners such as the station commanding officer or officer in charge, your Auxiliary Liaison Officer (AUXLO), participating Auxiliarists, and interagency collaborators. Review your social media platforms for public comments and insights. Analyzing how attendees found out about the event will help you fine-tune marketing efforts for next time.

**Reporting** of data is included in a summary submitted to your district staff officer for public affairs (DSO-PA) and the unit’s commanding officer if the event was held at a Coast Guard station. With impactful supporting imagery, reporting is shared with your district staff officer for publications (DSO-PB) to serve as the basis for articles and social media publications. To protect their privacy and rights, avoid including recognizable images of children if written parental consent (ANSC-7020) has not been obtained.



With recreational boating safety regarded as the Coast Guard Auxiliary’s “Job #1,” a Water Safety Fair will likely be the largest public affairs outreach effort organized by your Auxiliary unit each year. Although the details may initially appear overwhelming, early planning supported by plenty of Auxiliary volunteers is key to hosting a successful event. Our members and interagency partners often consider this an enjoyable and rewarding experience, with many returning to participate year after year.



**See the accompanying step-by-step checklist for successfully conducting a Water Safety Fair in your local boating community.**

**Left:** A young member of the recreational boating public interacts with “Coastie,” the Coast Guard Auxiliary’s remotely-operated spokes boat. Coastie is an interactive tool for teaching respect for the water to boaters. At forty-four inches tall, the robot is just the right size for communicating with children of all ages. Auxiliary photo by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2.

**Bottom Right:** Auxiliarist Lilli Ferguson demonstrates personal watercraft use with a National Park Service Ocean Rescue Team lifeguard at the Water Safety Fair at U.S. Coast Guard Station Golden Gate. Auxiliary photo by Roger Bazeley AUXPA1.

**Bottom Left:** A young member of the public practices line heaving under the observation of Auxiliarist Terry Blanchard, coxswain, during the Water Safety Fair at U.S.C.G. Coast Guard Station Golden Gate. Auxiliary photo by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2.







# Public Event Planning Checklist

## 4 Months in Advance

- ☐ Set event date (first weekend of NSBW) and time (1000-1300 + volunteer picnic)
- ☐ Select and reserve location
- ☐ Request CO approval via AUXLO
- ☐ Confirm USCG participation (open house, boat tours, SAR gear, surf video, Morale Fund sales)
- ☐ Review and invite participants (USCG Station, Air Station, Auxiliary, State & Local First Responders)
- ☐ Ensure adequate space (parking, docking, helicopter landing zone)

## 3 Months in Advance

- ☐ Email Notice of Intent to DSO-PA or NSBW Lead
- ☐ Appoint interagency coordinator & Auxiliary PA officer
- ☐ Create/distribute event flyer (schools, clubs, marinas, offices)
- ☐ Coordinate media outreach (socials, news, newsletters, calendars)
- ☐ Contact USCG PA for press release
- ☐ Assign photographers/videographers
- ☐ Plan displays (registration table, consent forms, waivers, QR signage)
- ☐ Design safety education displays (VSC, AUX info, paddlecraft safety, "Coastie," knot-tying, radio demos)
- ☐ Review materials; place ANSC orders
- ☐ Assign volunteer picnic coordinator

## 2 Months in Advance

- ☐ Order PFDs for giveaway; request state donations
- ☐ Request AUXLO approval for PFD delivery to station
- ☐ Contact OPFAC coxswains; confirm dock/tide suitability
- ☐ Contact Air Station PIO for rescue demo or static display
- ☐ Submit Public Affairs support request
- ☐ Order ANSC supplies (decals, pamphlets, coloring books, posters, whistles, stickers)
- ☐ Request volunteer support via flotilla/division commanders

## 1 Month in Advance

- ☐ Confirm PFD and ANSC material delivery
- ☐ Assign Auxiliary booth/display leads
- ☐ Confirm equipment readiness
- ☐ Remind OPFAC coxswains & interagency contacts
- ☐ Create layout map for displays & parking
- ☐ Arrange tables/chairs/tents
- ☐ File Assignment to Duty (if needed)
- ☐ Confirm volunteer currency, training, and uniforms

## 3-4 Weeks in Advance Event Final Planning/Logistics

- ☐ Arrange material transport; confirm station access
- ☐ Update digital ads and calendar posts
- ☐ Confirm picnic arrangements (food, prep, service)
- ☐ Prepare PA officers with talking points
- ☐ Check weather forecast; secure alternate venue
- ☐ Post roadside signs near high-traffic areas

## Event Day

- ☐ Set up displays 1-2 hours prior to event
- ☐ Liaison helps with interagency setup
- ☐ Distribute challenge coins (if available)
- ☐ Host volunteer appreciation picnic

## Immediate Post-Event Activity

- ☐ Contact follow-up leads (VSC, courses, joining AUX)
- ☐ Post event recap on social media with images
- ☐ Send thank-you notes to all participants
- ☐ Submit volunteer hours (10J)
- ☐ Submit event report to DSO-PA/NSBW Lead
- ☐ Conduct final debrief and document lessons learned



**Top:** Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter rescue swimmer demonstration at U.S.C.G. Station Golden Gate during a Water Safety Fair. Auxiliary photo by Tiffany Townsend, AUXPA2.



**Bottom:** Public outreach events are ideal for increasing public awareness of our boating safety literature and vital items such as paddlecraft "IF FOUND CONTACT" stickers. Keep in mind that these stickers are best delivered during a Vessel Examination.

# U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

## The Creative and Branding Division: In search of a motivated and skilled Graphic Artist National Staff Branch Assistant



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THIS ROLE DIRECTLY  
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AUXILIARY'S  
NATIONAL IMAGE

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WILL BE SEEN ACROSS  
THE COUNTRY AND  
WILL HELP MAINTAIN  
THE PROFESSIONAL  
PRESENCE AND  
CREDIBILITY OF THE  
U.S. COAST GUARD  
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### Shipmates,

The **Creative & Branding Division** is currently seeking a motivated and skilled member to fill the role of **Branch Assistant – National Graphic Artist** on the national staff.

This position plays a vital role in producing professional, on-brand materials that support national-level communication, recruitment, outreach, and member engagement efforts. If you have a creative eye and experience in graphic design, we encourage you to apply.

### Position:

Branch Assistant – National Graphic Artist  
Reports To: Branch Chief, Graphic Design (BC-ACS)

### Responsibilities Include:

- Designing flyers, brochures, banners, social media graphics, and presentations
- Adhering to official USCG Auxiliary branding and visual standards
- Supporting national campaigns and internal graphical needs
- Collaborating with other creatives and leadership to complete high-quality projects
- Meeting deadlines and maintaining consistency across all materials

### Preferred Skills:

- Proficiency in **Adobe Creative Cloud** (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Acrobat) **Canva** and **Google Workspace**
- Strong layout, typography, and color design fundamentals
- Ability to work independently while aligning with national direction

This opportunity for a skilled graphic designer Auxiliary member that enjoys **BRAND DESIGN** and wants to contribute to **THE AUXILIARY'S NATIONAL IMAGE**.

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## SEMPER PARATUS!



# Honoring 75 Years of Service: Clearwater Flotilla's Legacy in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

By Karen Miller, Flotilla Commander, Clearwater Flotilla 11-1

In 2024, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary celebrated its 85th year of service to the nation. As part of this milestone year, Flotilla 11-1, based in Clearwater, Florida, commemorated its own 75th anniversary with a ceremony held on March 29, 2025. As one of the longest-standing flotillas in the Auxiliary's Seventh District, 11-1's legacy of commitment, maritime safety, and public service was celebrated with enthusiasm and reverence by members, families, and civic leaders.

The anniversary celebration was the product of over 15 months of careful planning involving the venue, menu, guest list, and budget. As preparations unfolded, it became clear that the event would be something truly special—an opportunity to honor decades of dedication by volunteers who have served with distinction on Florida's Gulf Coast.



75th Anniversary Edition of Clearwater Flotilla's award-winning newsletter, 11-1 Channel Marker. Designed and edited by Lisa Repetto.

Held at the Clearwater Community Sailing Center, the evening began with guests gathering on the waterfront patio, enjoying appetizers and live saxophone music by Auxiliarist Scott Birdwell. The atmosphere was vibrant and welcoming, and the energy of the guests reflected a deep sense of pride and connection.

A stunning charcuterie table—crafted by members Ken Suarez and Jeff Otto—served as a focal point for conversation and admiration. Meanwhile, Betsy Scott, Flotilla Vice Commander, and her son, Christian Daigle, welcomed attendees at the reception table with warmth and hospitality. The dining hall quickly filled with a mix of familiar faces and new friends, representing the living continuity of the flotilla's mission and values.

Karen Miller, Flotilla Commander, opened the formal program by welcoming attendees, introducing dignitaries, and recognizing members for their long-standing service. During the evening, Mayor Bruce Rector presented Miller with a signed proclamation, formally recognizing Clearwater Flotilla's 75 years of service to the community.

"Clearwater is proud to be a Coast Guard City," said Mayor Bruce Rector. "This flotilla has embodied what it means to serve with honor, skill, and heart. Their contributions have strengthened our maritime safety and our community spirit."



Auxiliarist Scott Birdwell on his saxophone provided the entertainment during the attitude adjustment hour. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



Karen Miller, Flotilla Commander and Clearwater City Mayor Bruce Rector displaying the 75th Anniversary Proclamation. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



L to R: Karen Miller, Flotilla Commander, Betsy Scott, Flotilla Vice Commander in front of the step and repeat. Photo by Lisa Repetto



District 7 Commodore Martin Goodwin addresses the attendees. Photo by Lisa Repetto.

75th Anniversary Celebration attendees enjoying camaraderie. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



In his remarks, Pinellas County Commission chairman Brian Scott emphasized the essential role the Auxiliary plays in local emergency preparedness and community resilience: “In times of calm and crisis alike, the Coast Guard Auxiliary is there. Flotilla 11-1 has served as a steady hand for this county for 75 years, and we’re stronger for it.”

Representing active-duty leadership, Captain Michael Kahle, Commander of Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg, underscored the enduring partnership between active-duty units and the Auxiliary: “The Coast Guard could not do what it does without the Auxiliary. Clearwater Flotilla 11-1 has set a gold standard for volunteer service. Their legacy is not just long—it’s deep, and it’s impactful.”

Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners Chair Brian Scott addressing the attendees.  
Photo by Lisa Repetto.



Captain Kahle, Commander Sector St. Petersburg, Florida, addresses the attendees Photo by Lisa Repetto

A highlight of the evening was Miller’s engaging presentation of Clearwater Flotilla’s history over the past three decades. She noted that while records from the flotilla’s early years (1950–1990) are sparse, the past 30+ years have been carefully documented—starting with her own entry into the organization. Her stories highlighted both triumphs and lessons learned, including a once-flotilla-owned vessel that was eventually sold due to maintenance and operational challenges.

The flotilla’s history also includes moving through six different meeting venues before receiving anonymous donations and a Pinellas County grant to purchase its permanent headquarters on North Ft. Harrison—a facility that remains a central hub for operations and camaraderie.

As the event concluded, guests departed with full hearts and renewed purpose. The evening was more than a commemoration—it was a reaffirmation of commitment to the mission, values, and vision of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Miller ended the evening by expressing her wish that Clearwater Flotilla 11-1 continues to thrive for another 75 years and that she’s looking forward to the 100-year celebration.



Top to Bottom: Roast Pig—the main course. Charcuterie Table. Photos by Lisa Repetto.

# The Challenge Within: Saving Ships Before They Sink

By K.C. Murphy, BC-AME

Every organization faces challenges, but some of the most serious come not from outside forces, but from within. Our own leadership ranks—particularly among our most experienced and longstanding members—are showing signs of strain. These individuals, once pillars of our units, are sometimes slipping into patterns that, while often rooted in genuine frustration, can have unintended but harmful consequences.

Let’s be clear: these are people who have given generously, mentored deeply, and led with distinction. But over time, persistent negativity—sometimes catalyzed by a few vocal critics—can turn even well-meaning dissent into corrosive undercurrents. When newer members see respected veterans expressing disillusionment or resistance, they often follow their lead. Slowly, a culture of disengagement can take root, and entire units begin to falter. In too many cases, flotillas lose momentum, leaders burn out, and positions go unfilled. Eventually, the unit folds—not from a lack of potential, but from a loss of cohesion.

It’s painful to witness, especially when those involved are people we’ve admired and learned from. Their concerns are often valid, and their frustrations deserve to be heard.

However, without productive channels for discussion and collaboration, these sentiments can become counterproductive. The result? Once-vibrant units disband, and talented members move on—often welcomed elsewhere, **but** carrying with them the disappointment of a mission unfulfilled.

We cannot let this continue. The solution lies not in casting blame, but in strengthening our culture—by creating systems of support, mentorship, and accountability that meet challenges head-on. Early intervention is key. Bringing in experienced members from outside a struggling unit should be seen not as a failure, but as a commitment to collective success. This kind of outreach can reinvigorate struggling teams and remind everyone involved of the larger purpose we serve.

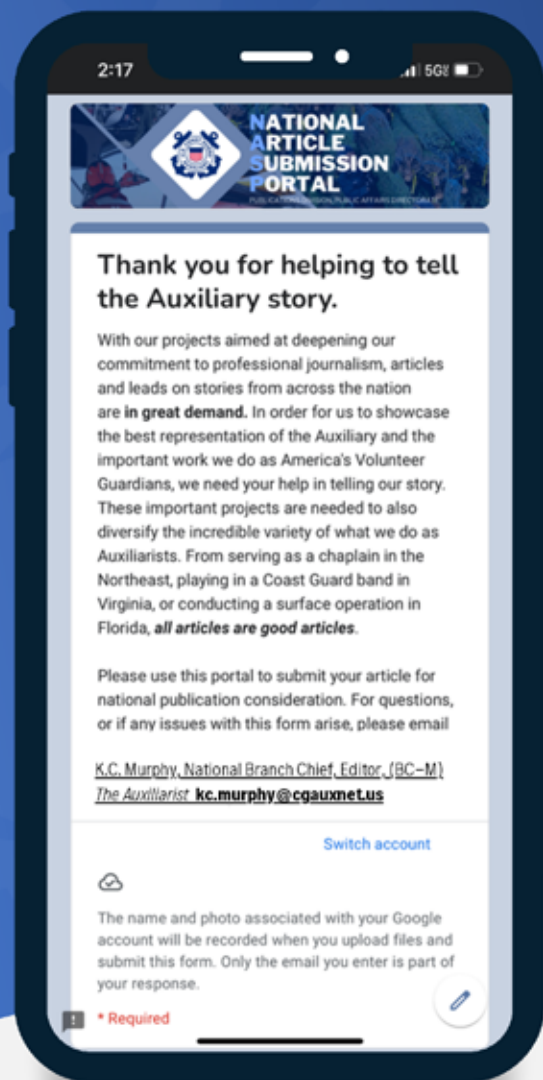
Many of the members who are struggling today were once our strongest contributors.

They may feel unheard or marginalized. They may carry a sense of loss over how their service has changed. But they are still valuable, and still capable of contributing meaningfully—if we take the time to engage, to listen, and to channel their experience into new opportunities.

We must train our leaders—not just in procedures, but in people. We need to build a culture that encourages open communication.







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## After The Swearing in, Then What?

By COMO Randy Ventress,  
Past District Commodore

### USCG Leadership Competency - Leading Self: Mentoring

Having worked in Human Resources for quite a while, I have spoken with applicants and have gained a lot of insight into what these potential members expect from the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and what they expect to contribute to the work we do. Usually, about nine out of every ten do not really have any direction. They don't know much about the organization, and almost all are willing to learn.

Human Resources is generally the potential new member's first introduction to the Auxiliary. A potential member relies heavily on the HR Officer, at first, for information on everything connected to the Auxiliary and our missions and programs. The HR Officer must be ready to answer questions or find the answers. Their responsiveness makes all the difference between keeping and losing this potential member.

Okay, your flotilla has a good (even excellent) FSO-HR. This staff officer spends time putting together the application package for potential members. This same dedicated member checks his or her email frequently to see if there are any membership inquiries coming down from National and if there is one in the flotilla's "neighborhood." They don't hesitate to pick up the phone, contact the potential member, and won't wait for a nearby flotilla to make the call first. This proactive HR Officer will more than likely get the potential new member into their flotilla.

The HR Officer contacts the individual, "talks up" the Auxiliary, and "sells" our missions and programs. The potential member fills out the paperwork and is ready (and often, eager) to go. At this point, the HR Officer checks the paperwork for correctness and has the Flotilla Commander sign the application package, after looking it over as a "second set of eyes." The paperwork is processed through the Director's Office, a Member Number is issued, and we get the new member on the path to becoming a productive member of the Auxiliary.

### Or do we?

We're often great salespeople, but our customer service may be lacking. This is the critical point of whether the new member will be a functioning member or someone whose only contribution to our flotilla is financial. We go through the stages of integration, from welcoming the new member to the swearing-in.

### Then what?

Do we have a "plan" for integrating the new member into the flotilla? Do we have a "team" to work this plan? And who is included in this team? Are there mentors assigned to the new member? If the answer is no to any of these questions, then why not?

### Who is responsible for mentoring a new member?

**Answer: Everyone in the flotilla, from the top down.**  
After the swearing in, then what? That's up to you.







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# An Auxiliarist's Journey to Coast Guard Reserve

by AUX Dorothy Riley  
and R. Michael Stringer, AUXPA3



Auxiliarist to U.S. Coast Guard Reserve officer Ensign Efrain Sora.  
Official portrait by U.S. Coast Guard.



Executed in April 2013, Black Swan was the largest and most complex full-scale offshore mass rescue operation (MRO) exercise. The out-of-revenue Royal Caribbean cruise ship had 400 federal employees aboard, acting as survivors of a maritime disaster. "This was a first of its kind exercise for the Auxiliary, doing something like this on such a large scale," Sora relates.

Sora participated aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Diamondback as an evaluator for the search and rescue exercises, which included simulated survivors brought ashore by life raft and registered at the landing site management area to fulfill the accountability component of the mission. "It has been my honor to work alongside partner agencies," Sora states, "observing a wide range of exercises and improving plans to protect critical infrastructure through the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment process."

Sora's decision to apply for the Reserve Officer Candidate Indoctrination (ROCI) program at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, marked a significant milestone in his career. Despite facing challenges such as a knee injury and the COVID-19 hiring freeze, he applied when the age cap increased from 35 to 41 and was accepted into the ROCI in June 2024. The ROCI is a rigorous five-week program designed to prepare candidates for effective service as officers in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve.

Drawing on his experience with active-duty personnel as an Auxiliarist, Sora prioritized sharing his knowledge with his classmates, many of whom were new recruits. He introduced them to key skills learned during his time in the Auxiliary, including uniforming and saluting protocols.

In his current role as a reserve officer, Sora is training as a pollution responder while also pursuing qualifications as an ICS Planning Section Chief and Operations Section Chief—essential milestones for becoming an Incident Commander. In these roles, he will continue sharing his incident response expertise with Auxiliarists training in emergency management and disaster response.

Ensign Sora receiving his certificate of completion for the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve Officer Candidate Indoctrination (ROCI) program from his father in June 2024. Auxiliary photo by R. Michael Stringer, AUXPA3.





# United States Coast Guard Pipe Band: Honor, Dignity and Service

By Joy C. Burnette



Above: The USCG Pipe Band Participating in the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade. USCG Photo by PAC Tom Sperduto

Nothing stirs the imagination like the sound of pipers and drummers marching in a parade or the soulful sound of bagpipes at funerals honoring those who served.

What started as a small group of enthusiastic pipers and drummers has grown into an active organization across the United States and beyond. Band members include active duty, retired, reserve, and Auxiliary Coast Guard personnel. They maintain the devoted Coast Guard Pipe Band.

The association of bagpipes with the military dates back hundreds of years. Pipers were an integral part of Scottish Highland clan life. Queen Victoria enjoyed Highland culture and included pipers and a Pipe Major in each Highland regiment battalion. When Highland regiments were integrated into the British Army, pipers were included. Pipers joined drummers to provide cadence for soldiers during long marches. The British tradition spread to militaries around the world. Today the Coast Guard Pipe Band performs to honor and support Coast Guardsmen.



Bass Drummer Michael Scheuer performing at the USCG Memorial Service, Grand Haven MI, during the Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival. Photo by Todd Wilkinson, USCGPB AUXPA1

Right: The official U.S. Coast Guard tartan based upon Alexander Hamilton's family tartan.

The band has performed at the Kennedy Center with the Chieftains, marched in the New York City Saint Patrick's Day parade, honored fallen sailors at the British Cemetery on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, and much more.

Bagpipes are a difficult instrument to learn. Mr. Loudermilk says it takes seven years to become proficient on the bagpipes. Musicians spend up to the first year playing a practice chanter. The practice chanter is a woodwind instrument used to learn to play a bagpipe. It is also used to practice new music, even as an experienced piper. The chanter is smaller and quieter than bagpipes, ideal for practicing. The most requested song of the band is "Amazing Grace." The "Star-Spangled Banner" can't be played on bagpipes, as they have a limited range.

The band was first conceived in 2001 by CWO Kevin P. Gilheany. He believed other pipers and drummers might be interested in forming a pipe band. A call for fellow guardsmen was posted. Seven pipers and three drummers responded.

In May 2002, the Coast Guard authorized the band to wear the Coast Guard tartan. In the fall of 2002, the pipe band became incorporated as a non-profit charity organization and was granted the right to use the name "United States Coast Guard Pipe Band." While the pipe band is not officially part of the Coast Guard, it is recognized as an affiliated organization.

Pipe band membership is voluntary and open to all Coast Guard, reserve, retirees, and Auxiliarists. There are 136 members across the United States and an additional 30 members in other countries. The Coast Guard Pipe Band's mission is to promote greater public awareness of the Coast Guard. The band achieves this by participating in memorial services, military balls, parades, ceremonies, changes of command, and funerals.

Auxiliarist Milton Loudermilk, the band's pipe major, shared that the pipe band first performed at the 2002 Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival, playing "Semper Paratus." The musicians volunteered their time and paid for their travel expenses to attend.



USCG Pipe Band loan piper providing honors at a Marine Corps veteran's funeral. Photo provided by USCG Pipe Band.



U.S.C.G. Pipe Band performing at the USCG Memorial Service, Grand Haven Michigan, 2 August 2024, during the Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival. Photo By Todd Wilkinson, USCGPB, AUXPA1.



U.S.C.G. Pipe Band membership is not limited to pipers and drummers. Many members fill supporting roles. Bagpipers are evaluated for levels of expertise and designated as one of three types of players: provisional piper, band piper, and piper. They wear the Coast Guard tartan kilt for performances. The tartan is based on the Hamilton tartan, which honors Alexander Hamilton, founder of the Coast Guard. The modern Coast Guard blue is symbolic of the seas and skies. The red represents the courage and sacrifice of Coast Guard members. The white over-stripe symbolizes the white sails of the first ten cutters.

The U.S.C.G. Pipe Band generates a feeling of pride. They are a group of dedicated musicians honoring the Coast Guard.



Above: U.S.C.G. Pipe Band performing at the Boyden House, Grand Haven MI, August 3, 2024, after the Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival Grand Parade. Photo by Todd Wilkinson, AUXPA1.



Official U.S. Coast Guard Pipe Band Standard. Photo by U.S.C.G. Pipe Band.



For more information about the U.S.C.G. Pipe Band including membership, click the graphic above.



U.S.C.G. Pipe Band after performing at the British War Graves Memorial Service, Ocracoke, North Carolina, 9 May 2024. Photo by Joanna Young, USCGPB.



U.S.C.G. Pipe Band marching in the 2024 Grand Haven Coast Guard Festival Parade, 3 August 2024, saluting the USCG Dignitaries. Photo by: Todd Wilkinson, USCGPB, AUXPA1.

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The *Auxiliarist* Editorial Team and the External Communications Division of the Public Affairs Directorate are committed to providing Auxiliarists with the latest happenings across the nation, keeping you updated through our stories to stay *Semper Paratus*.

COVER



**Auxiliarist Susan Stepputtis** proudly being pinned by her husband, Rick as an Honorary U.S. Coast Guard Chief at USCG Station Emerald Isle, North Carolina. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christine Bills.

BACK COVER



**Jamal Lee, AUXPA3** photographing USCG Small Boat recovery operations on the Potomac while augmenting the USCG Public Affairs Joint Information Center during the Potomac River Aviation Incident. Photo by Public Affairs National Staff member Julius Jackson.



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