

THE AUXILIARIST

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

**NATIONAL
SAFE BOATING
WEEK**



THE AUXILIARIST

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**National Branch Chief
Editor-In-Chief**
K.C. Murphy

Senior Editor
Kristen Iglesias

Layout /Design
Lisa Repetto

Content Editors
R. Michael Stringer
Tiffany G. Townsend
Kimberly K. Holland
Karen L. Miller
Joy Burnette
Christopher M. Orlando
Mitchell Schlitt
Jonathon Montgomery

**National Director of
Public Affairs**
Hector R. Corrales

**National Deputy Director
of Public Affairs**
Byron N. Voutsinas

**National Division Chief of
External Communications**
Joseph A. Feldman

**National Branch Chief of
Communications Support**
Matthew Thompson

Contributing Authors
Leon DeFulgentis, Barry Denton,
William Garvey, Richard Lavanture,
Camilo Olivieri, Christopher Orlando,
Murray Price, Lisa Repetto,
R. Michael Stringer, U.S. Coast Guard,
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Archive

Contributing Photographers
Leon DeFulgentis, Joseph Feldman,
COMO Joseph Giannattasio,
COMO Mary Kirkwood, Brad Lockhart,
K.C. Murphy, Chris Nubel,
Murray Price, National Safe Boating
Council, Lisa Repetto, Sandor Sherrod,
R. Michael Stringer, Cara Templeton,
U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard
Auxiliary Archive



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

Today'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.



The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is Now on DVIDS

DVIDS is a state-of-the-art, 24/7 operation that provides a timely, accurate, and reliable connection between the media around the world and the military serving at home and abroad. Through a network of portable Ku-band satellite transmitters located in theater, robust IP connections, and a distribution hub, DVIDS makes available real-time broadcast quality video, still images, and print products as well as immediate interview opportunities with service members, commanders and subject matter experts.

By promoting our commitment and reliability, we 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.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/unit/USCGA-NPAD>



"Rescue Swimmer's Perspective"
Photo by Joseph A. Feldman, AUXPA3



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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Staying Afloat:



National Safe Boating Week and the Lifesaving Mission of the U.S. Coast Guard

By Christopher M. Orlando, AUXPA1

Every year as the weather warms and boating season kicks into gear, marinas and waterways across the United States come alive with recreational boaters, anglers, and water sports enthusiasts. To coincide with this seasonal swell of activity on the water, National Safe Boating Week, observed annually in late May, serves as a timely and essential reminder of the importance of boating safety. Sponsored by the National Safe Boating Council in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, this weeklong campaign emphasizes life jacket use, situational awareness, and overall safe boating practices. At the heart of this initiative stands the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, a volunteer organization dedicated to supporting the Coast Guard's mission and educating the public to ensure safe and responsible recreational boating.

National Safe Boating Week began in 1952 and was later declared an official national observance by Congress in 1958. It marks the kickoff of the Safe Boating Campaign, a year-round effort to raise awareness about boating safety. While the campaign covers a wide array of safety messages, its flagship initiative encourages boaters to "Wear It"—referring to life jackets, which remain one of the simplest and most effective tools to prevent drowning.

In recent years, Safe Boating Week has also promoted education around modern safety technologies like Emergency Cut-Off Switches (ECOS), vessel float plans, and the use of communication and navigation tools. The goal is to prepare boaters not just for the fun of boating but also for the unexpected. According to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, the vast majority of fatal boating accidents involve boaters who were not wearing life jackets or who lacked boating education. These are precisely the areas where the Coast Guard Auxiliary shines.



During National Safe Boating Week, Auxiliary units across the country mobilize to bring safety information directly to the public through a variety of outreach efforts, including:

- Public Education Courses:** The Auxiliary offers nationally-recognized boating safety classes such as Boat America and Boating Skills and Seamanship. These courses cover essential topics such as navigation rules, emergency procedures, and weather awareness.



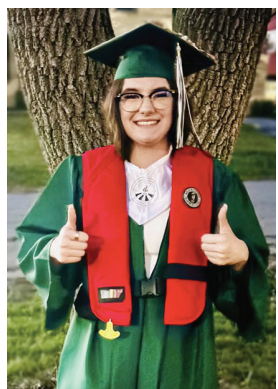
- Vessel Safety Checks:** One of the most popular Auxiliary programs is the free Vessel Safety Check (VSC). Auxiliarists inspect recreational boats to ensure they meet federal and state safety regulations. From life jackets and fire extinguishers to flares and navigation lights, they help boaters correct any deficiencies before they become emergencies.



- Community Outreach and Events:** Whether setting up a booth at a boat show, presenting safety tips at schools, or organizing water-based demonstrations, Auxiliarists connect with their communities in person. These interactions often serve as the first exposure many boaters have to boating safety.



- Public Affairs Campaigns:** Auxiliary Public Affairs officers leverage digital platforms to amplify safety messages. Hashtags like #SafeBoatingWeek, #USCGAux, and #WearIt help spread awareness across diverse audiences.



- Life Jacket Awareness:** On "Wear Your Life Jacket at Work Day," Auxiliarists join boating professionals and enthusiasts nationwide in donning their life jackets on land to promote awareness in a fun and visual way. This light-hearted initiative carries a life-saving message.

While National Safe Boating Week shines a spotlight on safety, the Auxiliary's commitment is year-round. Recreational boating accidents don't only happen in the summer; they occur in all seasons, often due to operator inexperience, alcohol use, or equipment failure. The Auxiliary helps mitigate these risks through:

- **Boating Safety Courses** available in person or virtually where permitted throughout the year.
- **On-the-Water Patrols** that provide assistance and offer safety advice.
- **Radio Watchstanders** who help monitor distress calls and communicate with boaters.
- **Disaster Response** in support of local and federal emergency operations.

Perhaps most importantly, Auxiliarists serve as role models. By demonstrating proper safety behaviors—such as wearing life jackets, avoiding alcohol while boating, and filing float plans—they lead by example.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard's 2024 Recreational Boating Statistics report, there were 3,877 recreational boating accidents reported, resulting in 556 deaths and thousands of injuries. Most of these tragedies were preventable. The top five contributing factors include operator inattention, inexperience, excessive speed, machinery failure, and alcohol use. In nearly 87% of fatal accidents, the victim was not wearing a life jacket.

This data underscores why the Coast Guard Auxiliary's work is so vital. Every safety class taught, every vessel safety check performed, every conversation at a marina could be the one that saves a life.



National Safe Boating Week is more than a campaign—it's a call to action. Here's how you can participate:

1. **Take a Boating Safety Course:** Even experienced boaters can benefit from a refresher.
2. **Schedule a Free Vessel Safety Check:** It's simple, free, and non-punitive.
3. **Wear Your Life Jacket:** *Always.* And encourage others to do the same.
4. **Share Safety Messages on Social Media:** Help amplify the Auxiliary's mission.
5. **Volunteer:** If you're passionate about boating and public service, consider expanding your commitment with the Auxiliary.

As National Safe Boating Week reminds us, safety on the water doesn't happen by accident—it happens through awareness, education, and preparation.

Whether you're a first-time kayaker or a seasoned sailor, the Coast Guard Auxiliary is dedicated to ensuring that time on the water is memorable—for all the *right* reasons.



"The Recreational Boating Safety Outreach Directorate promoted National Safe Boating Week across multiple platforms. Members of the Districts Liaison Division worked with State Boating Law Administrators to publish NSBW proclamations in half of the states. The Communications Division shared numerous boating safety messages, reaching over 100,000 people via social media. The Paddlecraft Safety Division partnered with Kayaking 101 and kayak instructor programs in the Southeast, supporting on-water beginner and advanced paddling classes at more than 20 locations. The Outreach Liaison Division worked with West Marine to offer safety programs, including public education and vessel safety checks, at all 219 West Marine stores, leading to approximately 540,000 unique contacts with recreational boaters. These efforts directly engaged hundreds of thousands of boaters while delivering the message that safer boating is more fun."

—Robert "Robin" Pope III, Director, Recreational Boating Safety Outreach Directorate



"The Communications Division serves as the voice of the Coast Guard Auxiliary for National Safe Boating Week. Each of our Branches collaborated and shared engaging and educational content across social media platforms and publications like The Auxiliarist," said "We also collaborated with Active Duty and Reserve unit social media accounts to spread our message of promoting boating safety to an even larger audience."

—Joseph Feldman, AUXPA3, Chief, Communications Division, Public Affairs Directorate.



"The Public Affairs Directorate drove the visibility of National Safe Boating Week this year, just as we should. Our team created and shared branded materials, curated compelling imagery, and kept the conversation alive across social media. We made sure the Auxiliary's presence wasn't just seen, it was felt—in communities and the pages of The Auxiliarist. That's our job. Tell the story. Amplify the message. Keep safety at the forefront."

—Rick Corrales, AUXPA1, Director, Public Affairs Directorate



A growing percentage of boaters are operating paddlecraft... about 40 percent of all boaters. Relatively few of these boaters have had any boater education, and many do not even think of themselves as boaters. It is essential that they understand the importance of such basic practices as wearing a life jacket and selecting the right paddling venue for their skills.

—Roland McDevitt, Division Chief, Paddlecraft Safety

A HOLISTIC STRATEGY FOR AUXILIARY WELL-BEING

Avoiding Burnout—Even as Volunteers

By Camilo Olivieri, BC-QPI

While U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliarists are not always on the front lines, we often operate in high-stress environments and carry responsibilities that mirror those of first responders, without the same institutional safety nets. From stressful Search and Rescue missions to interpersonal conflicts, weather emergencies, or the slow creep of burnout caused by the inability to say “no,” stress is very real in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Unlike paid professionals, volunteers often juggle Coast Guard Auxiliary service alongside work, family, and other commitments. That makes *our* self-care all the more critical. Chronic stress doesn't discriminate—it can undermine physical health, emotional well-being, and even unit performance. The good news? Strategic, initiative-taking wellness practices can help us stay resilient and engaged in service.

The A.R.S.E.N.A.L. Strategy for Auxiliarists

H.L. Thompson, organizational psychologist and combat veteran, introduced the **A.R.S.E.N.A.L. Strategy**—a seven-part toolkit for resilience. These practices can help Auxiliarists build a strong wellness baseline and recover more quickly from stressors.

Awareness: Recognize your emotional and physical states. Understand personal stress triggers—whether it's too many commitments or a mission that didn't go as planned. Self-awareness is the first defense against burnout.

Rest: Take breaks—real ones. Step away from the computer, go outside, or schedule true time off. Sleep is not a luxury; it's operational readiness. A rested Auxiliarist is more effective, safer on patrols, and a better team member.

Support: Connect with shipmates. Peer support within the Auxiliary builds unit morale. Talk with fellow members after challenging missions or events. Leaders should foster a culture where it's okay to ask for help.



Exercise: Movement boosts emotional resilience. Whether walking your dog, joining a fitness class, or participating in flotilla physical fitness challenges, find an activity you enjoy and commit to.

Nutrition: Stay hydrated and eat foods that fuel you. Skip the donuts at morning briefings and bring healthier options. What you eat affects how you think, feel, and perform.

Attitude: Positivity spreads. A leader's calm demeanor, a mentor's encouragement, or simply thanking a fellow member—these small actions shape unit culture.

Learning: Stay curious. Whether it's a new course, boating skill, or public affairs tool, growth combats stagnation. Auxiliarists thrive when learning is part of the journey.

Stress management, physical fitness, emotional and mental resilience are intrinsically related, as any effort invested in one will affect the others.

Tactical Tools You Can Use Now

While A.R.S.E.N.A.L. lays the foundation, here are a few specific practices Auxiliarists can

use—even during busy ops weeks or flotilla deadlines:

Sleep Hygiene

Dark, cool, quiet rooms lead to better sleep. Avoid screen time before bed and aim for consistent sleep schedules—even during multi-day events.

Morning sunlight helps reset your biological clock. Try to get 10 minutes of sun before morning activities, missions, or meetings.

Stress Breaks

Breathing techniques like the *physiological sigh* (two quick nasal inhales, slow exhale) can calm nerves before public speaking or a flotilla meeting.

“Walk-and-talks” with a fellow member can ease conflict or improve brainstorming during planning sessions.

Movement

Take stretch or step breaks every hour during long AUXDATA or training sessions.

Consider group walks after meetings, or encourage flotilla fitness challenges.

Using Tech for Health

Smartwatches, fitness trackers, and even sleep-monitoring rings can give insight into your body's stress responses. Use what you learn to spot unhealthy patterns early. When asked about using these health monitoring technologies, numerous Auxiliarists have reported improved sleep and lowered blood pressure simply by tracking hydration and evening screen use.

An Investment in Ourselves—and Our Mission

Volunteers can fall into the trap of over-serving. But service at the expense of wellness is unsustainable. Units thrive when members are healthy, rested, and supported. Investing in personal well-being means investing in mission readiness—whether it's during vessel exams, at the helm, or in leadership roles.

Auxiliary leaders should model these strategies and encourage their members to adopt them. A culture of well-being supports retention, teamwork, and ultimately, safer operations.

Even small changes—an earlier bedtime, a few more steps each day, or a shared conversation—can build resilience. And resilience ensures we're ready for the next mission, whatever it may bring.

The compounding effect of small gains is what makes the difference in our emotional, mental, and physical resiliency.



Editor's note: Remember that the Coast Guard Auxiliary has incorporated Suicide Prevention as one of the mandatory courses in Auxiliary Core Training (AUXCT).

There are also specific members trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). CISM is an intervention protocol developed specifically for dealing with traumatic events. It is a process for helping those involved in a critical incident share their experiences, vent emotions, learn about stress reactions and symptoms, and provide for further help if required.

What Is CISM?—Critical Incident Stress Management

It is not psychotherapy. It is a confidential and voluntary process, sometimes called ‘psychological first aid.’

First developed for use with military combat veterans and then civilian first responders (police, fire, ambulance, emergency workers, and disaster rescuers), it has now been adapted and used virtually everywhere there is a need to address the traumatic impact on people's lives.



About the Article and The Author

This article was originally authored by Camilo Olivieri (see his credentials below). Mr. Oliveri has given *The Auxiliarist* editors permission to edit the article to fit better the situations that could be experienced by our members.

Camilo “Cam” Olivieri is passionate about empowering first responders and their support systems with action-oriented, evidence-based, holistic tools and strategies for mental, emotional, and physical health. Cam holds academic degrees in I/O psychology and emergency management. Cam has earned multiple professional credentials, including CEM®, TEM®, CGEMC, MEP, MEMS-M, OHST®, and LP.

As an Auxiliarist, Cam currently serves as the Q-Directorate Branch Chief for Emergency Management Instructor Coordination and is the Assistant District Staff Officer for Emergency Management in the USCG Heartland District-Coastal Region. He is a mentor and training officer for Air Station Houston Flotilla (6-12).



Understanding Your Leadership Style: A Vital Step for U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Members

By Barry Denton,
ANACO-FCd, FORCECOM, AUXPA1

Effective leadership is at the core of every successful mission in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Whether you're coordinating a vessel safety check, mentoring new members, or leading a flotilla meeting, your ability to lead impacts the mission, morale, and cohesion of your team. But true leadership begins with self-awareness—specifically, understanding your own leadership style. Knowing how you lead helps you communicate clearly, delegate effectively, and inspire those around you, especially in high-stakes environments.

Leadership isn't one-size-fits-all. Each Auxiliary member brings a unique personality, perspective, and skill set. That's why identifying your leadership style is essential—not only for personal development but also for the overall performance of your unit. Are you a collaborative leader who seeks team consensus? Or are you more of a directive leader who thrives in fast-paced, decision-heavy scenarios? Recognizing these tendencies helps clarify your strengths and uncover areas for growth.



To gain insight into your leadership style, various assessments are available. One of the most popular is the CliftonStrengths Assessment (formerly known as StrengthsFinder), which helps individuals identify their top five strengths from a list of 34 themes. For example, someone whose strengths include "Command," "Activator," and "Strategic" may naturally assume leadership roles and excel in crisis response—an essential trait in Auxiliary missions involving SAR (search and rescue) coordination or disaster support.

Another valuable tool is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which categorizes personalities into 16 distinct types. An MBTI result like ENTJ (Extraverted, Intuitive, Thinking, Judging) often signals a natural leader with vision and execution. Conversely, an ISFJ (Introverted, Sensing, Feeling, Judging) might prefer supporting leadership roles, excelling in behind-the-scenes planning or mentorship. Neither is superior; both are vital to the Auxiliary's operational success.

Understanding your leadership style also allows you to interact more effectively with others. For example, if you tend to make quick decisions under pressure (a trait often seen in "Command" or "Judging" styles), being aware of this can help you slow down and seek feedback when collaborating with team members who are more analytical or cautious. This adaptability strengthens team cohesion and prevents miscommunication during missions.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary also provides a robust leadership development track to help members grow. Through the Auxiliary Leadership and Management School (AUXLAMS), members explore critical skills such as team building, conflict resolution, ethical decision-making, and situational leadership. This course is often the first formal step toward leadership roles within the organization and is highly recommended for those aspiring to serve as flotilla or division officers.

Participating in these leadership courses is more than a checkbox for progression in our illustrious organization, but it's a commitment to bettering oneself and enhancing the Auxiliary's mission readiness. They teach principles rooted in the core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty, reinforcing that leadership is about service and accountability. Members who complete these programs often become more confident, thoughtful, and effective in both operational and administrative roles.

Furthermore, leadership assessments can help guide Auxiliary members into the appropriate courses, certifications, or staff positions that align with their personal and professional goals. A member with high empathy and communication strengths may be better suited for roles in public affairs, while a strategic and execution-focused member may flourish in operations or training coordination. When matched with formal leadership education, these insights become powerful tools for advancement and service.

In closing, leadership is not simply about making requests or, in the active-duty world, giving orders—it's about influence, example, and alignment. By understanding and embracing your leadership style through tools like StrengthsFinder, the Myers-Briggs assessment, and the Auxiliary's leadership curriculum, you set yourself—and your team—on a path to greater impact. The Coast Guard Auxiliary's strength lies in our people and their experience, and by nurturing that strength through continued education and self-awareness, we ensure mission success across every shore and station.



USCGC Storis Departs on Maiden Voyage

PASCAGOULA, Mississippi - The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Storis* (WAGB 21), the Coast Guard's first polar icebreaker acquired in more than 25 years, departed on its maiden voyage to safeguard U.S. sovereign interests in the Arctic and conduct Coast Guard missions.

Storis' departure marks an early milestone in the Service's transformation through Force Design 2028 (FD2028), which includes reforming Coast Guard acquisitions to rapidly deploy capabilities to execute the Coast Guard's missions.

The motor vessel *Aiviq*, acquired Dec. 20, 2024, from an Edison Chouest Offshore subsidiary, was renamed *Storis* following modifications to enhance communications and self-defense capabilities. The vessel will expand U.S. operational presence in the Arctic and support Coast Guard missions while the service awaits the delivery of the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) class. The Coast Guard will continue evaluating the cutter's condition and requirements to achieve full operational capability.

Storis is commanded by Capt. Keith M. Ropella who currently serves as chief of cutter forces at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington D.C., and previously commanded Coast Guard Cutter *Polar Star* (WAGB 10), from July 2022 to July 2024.

The vessel is staffed with a hybrid crew consisting of military cuttermen and civilian mariners. This is the second vessel in Coast Guard history to bear the name *Storis*. The original *Storis*, known as the "Galloping Ghost of the Alaskan Coast," had a storied history conducting 64 years of icebreaking operations in Alaska and the Arctic before being decommissioned in 2007.



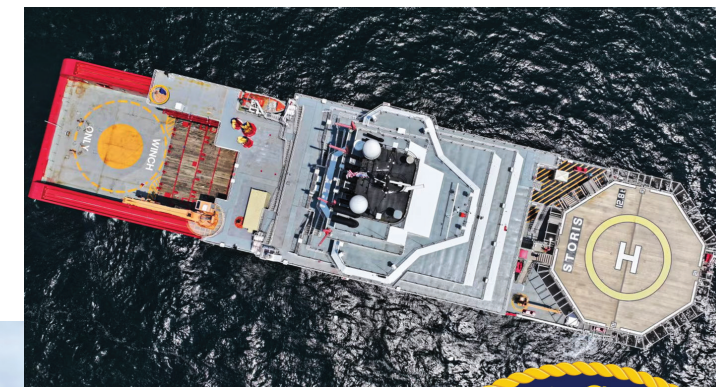
Photos and release provided by U.S. Coast Guard Public Affairs

USCGC *Storis* will be commissioned this August in Juneau, Alaska, which will eventually be the vessel's permanent homeport. Until the necessary shore infrastructure improvements are completed in Juneau, *Storis* will be temporarily berthed in Seattle, Washington, with the Service's two other polar icebreakers.

The acquisition was made possible through the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 and fiscal year 2024 appropriations. It does not affect the ongoing procurement of PSCs and is not part of the PSC program of record.

The Coast Guard operates the United States' fleet of icebreakers to assure access to the polar regions to protect U.S. sovereignty. To fulfill this mission and meet operational needs in the polar regions, the Coast Guard requires a fleet of eight to nine polar icebreakers. In support of the President's intent to acquire at least 40 new icebreakers, the Coast Guard is working to replace, modernize and grow its aging fleet of icebreakers, which currently includes three polar icebreakers, 21 domestic icebreakers and 16 ice-capable buoy tenders. As the United States' third polar icebreaker, *Storis* will provide near-term operational presence and support national security as a bridging strategy until the full complement of PSCs is delivered.

Announced by Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem on May 21, FD 2028 is a blueprint to transform the Coast Guard into a stronger, more ready and capable fighting force. This initiative will include campaigns focused on people, organization, contracting and acquisition, and technology.



Editor's note: With this article we are introducing a feature intended to help units get the word out about the missions of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, in this case, republished from Recreational Boating Safety's Job #1 (Spring/Summer Edition). We encourage you to copy and paste this article, in whole or in part, to aid your unit with your outreach efforts.

Boating Safety: It's Everyone's Responsibility

By Christopher M. Orlando, AUXPA1

Whether you're behind the wheel, sitting in the cockpit, or a passenger along for the ride, safety on the water starts with all of us. Always wear a life jacket, follow the rules, and stay alert to your surroundings. It only takes a split second for things to go wrong, but a few simple precautions can help prevent accidents and keep everyone safe.

"Every serious boating accident is a tragedy, leading to property damage, personal injury, and, in some cases, death," said Robin Pope, Director of the Recreational Boating Safety Directorate (DIR-B) "Those tragedies are compounded because nearly all could have been prevented through simple steps."

Boating safely is crucial to ensuring that everyone enjoys their time on the water while minimizing the risk of accidents. Here are some essential tips for boating safely:

Wear a Life Jacket

According to the U.S. Coast Guard 2024 boating safety statistics, drowning accounted for 75 percent of deaths, with 87 percent of those victims not wearing life jackets.

Always wear a properly fitted life jacket. Even if you're a strong swimmer, unexpected situations like capsizing or falling overboard can happen to anyone, and unexpectedly entering the water is the most common type of fatal boating accident.

Check the Weather

Before heading out, check the weather forecast. Avoid boating in rough conditions or if storms are expected. Sudden weather changes can be dangerous on the water.

In a May 28, 2024 press release U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Amy Beach, Inspections and Compliance director said, "Boaters should remain vigilant on the water as most incidents occur when you might least expect them—in good visibility, calm waters and little wind."

Know the Boat

Familiarize yourself with the boat's operation, including launching, boat handling, navigation, and use of safety equipment like fire extinguishers and distress signals.

Stay Sober

Alcohol continued to be the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents in 2024, accounting for 79 deaths, or 17 percent of total fatalities, according to the U.S. Coast Guard 2024 boating safety statistics.

Boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs is just as dangerous as driving a car. Stay alert and make sure your passengers do, too.

File a Float Plan

Let someone on land who wants you to come back know where you're going and when you expect to return, especially for longer trips.

Make sure to share any changes in plans and a picture of your vessel in case of an emergency.

Observe Speed Limits and Navigational Rules

Follow posted speed limits and be mindful of no-wake zones. Always give right of way to other vessels when required.

Capt. Beach said in the May 28 press release, "The most frequent events involve collisions with other vessels, objects or groundings, which is why it is so important to keep a proper lookout, navigate at a safe speed, adhere to navigation rules and obey navigation aids."

Carry Safety Equipment

Equip your boat with essential safety gear, such as a first aid kit, visual and sound signaling devices such as flares, whistles or horns; a flashlight, a rescue throw bag, and a fire extinguisher. Not every boat needs every piece of safety equipment but each boat needs its own specific safety equipment. Make sure you know what your boat needs and how to use it. You can find suggested equipment at www.cgaux.org on the Recreational Boating Safety Directorate webpages.

Practice Proper Boat Handling

Be aware of the boat's handling characteristics, especially in tight spots or around other vessels. Take boating courses to improve your skills.

The U.S. Coast Guard 2024 Recreational Boating Safety report also said that operator inattention, improper lookout, operator inexperience, excessive speed, and machinery failure ranked as the top five primary contributing factors in accidents.

The report also found that 75% of deaths occurred on boats where the operator did not receive boating safety instruction. Only 15% percent of deaths occurred on vessels where the operator had received a nationally-approved boating safety education certificate.

Check Equipment Regularly

Inspect your boat before each outing to ensure it's in good condition, including checking for leaks, ensuring the motor works, and testing all electrical systems.

"Boating is fun but safer boating is more fun. Simple actions prevent boating tragedies and help everyone enjoy their time on the water," said Pope.

Remember: Boating safety is no accident! Let's all do our part to make the water a safer place for everyone



DO YOU LOVE RBS?

Earn the Recreational Boating Safety Device!

The Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) Device Award recognizes extraordinary effort of Auxiliarists who consistently provide strong support to RBS programs. It requires significant activity in boating safety programs over a minimum period of two years.



Auxiliarists must earn 120 points for two consecutive years (240 in total) to earn the RBS Device Award. Points are awarded as follows:

Vessel Examinations

- 1 point per paddlecraft exam
- 1 point per vessel exam

Paddlecraft Operations

- 1 point per patrol hour

Program Visitation

- 1 point per visit

Legislative Outreach

- 1 point per hour
- Federal Legislature
- State Legislatures
- State Boating Admins

Public Education

- 1 point per hour as lead*
 - 1/2 point per hour as aide*
- *This includes AUXPAD Ashore instruction

Public Affairs

- 1 point per hour
- External Print Media
- Broadcast Media
- Speeches/Talks
- Community Relations



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Crafting Great Paddlers

Days of Sun and Fun While Learning to Help Keep Themselves and Other Paddlers Safe

By William Garvey, AUXPA3



Some takeaways from a very special, on-water week:

A sea of blinding bright orange; laughter and sunshine in happy abundance; dripping wet exits and heavenly emergence; unfounded Francine fright; and a clever license plate lexicon.

Beginning with that last item first. When you spot a parked pickup from New York with a “KYAKR” tag, close by a Virginian’s SUV sporting a “MOBIDK” license, which is next to another pickup with an “AUXPAD” plate, you know “wet setters” have assembled. And they had, with good intention.

The gathering place: James Island County Park, a 643-acre green haven featuring 16 lake acres in Charleston, South Carolina; the dates: April 29 – May 2; and the event: SAT2025, that’s an abbreviation for the Spring 2025 Auxiliary Paddlecraft (AUXPAD) Training event.

This the U.S.C.G. Auxiliary’s second annual instructional gathering for paddlers of kayaks, canoes, and stand-up paddleboards, SAT2025 drew participants from across the country, with the Auxiliary Association defraying a portion of the expense. Newcomers were there to learn paddling basics while paddle veterans came to hone their skills and some hoped to qualify as instructors in the fast-growing segment of recreational boating.

The Appeal, the Problem, the Program...

Low entry, operating and maintenance costs, easy storage and transport, and ready access to lakes, ponds, rivers and coastlines are some of the reasons behind paddlesports’ popularity.

However, those same factors, combined with a general lack of regulation, oversight, and training have a downside. Paddlers now account for one out of every three recreational boating fatalities in the U.S. and that trend is worsening. Indeed, a month prior to SAT25, a lone kayaker drowned in a lake 50 miles north; his life jacket was found in his swamped vessel and secured beneath fishing gear.

The purpose of SAT2025 was to prevent such tragedies by helping attendees gain the knowledge and skills to paddle safely and then influence similar behavior by others through example and sharing experiences and knowledge. However, almost as important among those at the gathering was their ever-ready inclination for having fun in the learning and doing. And that was very much in evidence throughout the week.

The three dozen trainees were divided into four groups, or “tracks.” Track 1 contained beginners; Track 1.5 advanced beginners; Track 2 comprised skilled paddlers interested in becoming instructors; and Track 3 was populated by instructors attaining advanced skills and updating their currency. All the instruction complied with course curricula formulated by the American Canoe Association (ACA), an Auxiliary partner in promoting safe paddlecrafting. Each of the tracks had at least one advanced ACA Instructor Trainer providing the

information, demonstrating on-water techniques, and then assessing the trainees’ knowledge; that is to say, they really knew their stuff and how best to share it to make it stick.

Wet Work and Beach Briefings

On most days the instruction began with onshore briefings at 0800, followed by on-water activities, a lunch break, more “beach talk” and waterwork until late afternoon. Although most of that took place in the park, Track 2 also spent time on the nearby Folly River. Meanwhile, Track 3’s first two training days were conducted at and on Charleston Harbor, and included a simulated rescue of two in-water kayakers, both instructor/trainees, and their transfer to a pair of 27-ft utility boats and crews from U.S.C.G. Station Charleston.

Irrespective of their Track or location, everyone involved stood out from the masses and the surroundings thanks to being uniformly attired in screaming orange long-sleeved “rashguard” T-shirts. As the instructors explained, kayaks are small and low so it’s important to be seen by those in larger, faster vessels. Being bright orange helps.

Once a day’s waterwork was done, most of the trainees and some out-of-town instructors retired to the park’s village of top quality, 3-bedroom, air-conditioned cottages, complete with front porches, living rooms, full kitchens and baths. Group dinners in local eateries were impromptu and casual, the table conversations predictably noisy, animated, and often hilarious.

While the training was tailored to the respective groups, several skills kept repeating, albeit with greater complexity and scrutiny as the exercises advanced up the tracks. High among these were the ability to exit a capsized kayak, then right and reenter it. Turning turtle and escaping while submerged—aka, a “wet exit”—was part of the Track 1 curriculum. Righting and reentering while in deep water were critical skills learned by advanced beginners.

When a capsized kayak has an unresponsive paddler within, the training had a second paddler come alongside, reach across the overturned hull, grab hold of the cockpit coaming and use leverage to pull and rotate the vessel and occupant right-side up. That potentially lifesaving maneuver is referred to by some as the “Hand of God” at work.

These and other on-water skills including launching, towing, docking, maneuvering, signaling, various reentry methods and paddle strokes, maintaining posture and balance and more were complemented by instruction on an extensive array of onshore considerations. Among these were evaluating the weather, water conditions and the capabilities of each member of the paddle group, selection and proper fastening of life jackets, confirming vessel integrity along with placement and functioning of safety equipment, route planning, and emergency procedures.



Coast Guard crew reach to haul a simulated capsized paddler onto their utility boat during SAT2025. Auxiliary photo by Brad Lockhart.

GAR Gulp!

As for “Francine,” a GAR (green-amber-red) pre-launch risk assessment exercise by Track 1.5 members produced the following list of potential hazards: heatstroke, dehydration, fire ants, drowning, poison ivy, and alligators.



Yes, the park has a small, permanent congregation of resident alligators. Foremost among these is Francine, measuring 5-feet, 11-inches from her protruding snout to

the tip of her well-muscled tail. Out-of-state visitors are often and understandably unsettled by the prospect of sharing the water with wild, toothy carnivores in waiting.

But the practical fact is ‘gators don’t like crowds of people, loud noises, or lakes teeming with flotillas of paddle-pumping kayakers. And if any indicate otherwise, they are quickly relocated to remote locations well beyond the park. Fire ants and poison ivy pose a far greater threat than Francine and family.

Much of the last day’s activity was devoted to practicing stand-up paddleboarding, a relatively new water sport that’s proven popular with the public. Since many participants have little or no paddling experience, they comprise a ripe audience to see and hear the right and safe way to enjoy themselves. And by the time SAT2025’s final session ended, every trainee had advanced in paddling skills, planning, assessing and the ability to share all of that with others. Notably, all nine of the Track 2 trainees earned ACA instructor credentials, six as Level 1 and three as Level 2. Gaining such expertise can save lives, which, after all, was the ultimate goal of the gathering.

Charleston’s James Island County Park will also be the host site for SAT2026, which is set for May 4-8, 2026. The week promises to be full of wise insights, wet workouts and fun, a perfect package for paddlers with good purpose.

Free “If Found” ID stickers for paddlecraft are available from the National Supply Center.

Vessel Identification Sticker for Canoe, Kayak, SUP or Rowboat

IF FOUND - CONTACT

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Phone: _____

Use waterproof marker uscgboating.org



Charleston, SC April 28, 2025 – (left to right) Auxiliaryists Roland McDevitt, Elizabeth Eynon, Chris Howe, and Dan Miller arriving for the start of SAT2025. Auxiliary Photo by Chris Nubel.



Scott Szczepaniak welcoming Auxiliaryists Sandy Goldberg and Jorge Ramirez to SAT2025. Auxiliary photo by Chris Nubel.



Members of Track 3 cruise their kayaks across Charleston Harbor during SAT2025. Auxiliary photo by Brad Lockhart.



Trainees at SAT2025 undergoing the initial on-water exercise in Stand-Up Paddleboarding 101. Auxiliary photo by Brad Lockhart.



What Paddlers Say About SAT2025...

“The inaugural event was good, but this was better. People liked the park, the cottages and the pond. Groups did the basics there but there were options to also go to the river or Charleston Harbor. The people in my Track participated in a unique training event on the harbor with the Coast Guard and some also instructed students and staff from the College of Charleston. Overall, it was great and I look forward to seeing the folks again in Charleston in 2026.”

—Jim Walsh, Barnstable Flotilla 013-11-06, SAT2025 Track 3.

“A raging success and near perfect. One of the best Auxiliary events I’ve ever been to. Much credit is due to Roland [McDevitt, Division Chief, Paddlecraft Safety, U.S.C.G. Auxiliary] and Scott [Szczepaniak, Recreational Boating Safety Program Specialist, USCG Southeast District] who started the planning cycle last fall and covered all the bases including location, instructors, finance, logistics, fellowship and public affairs. Then they got on the water and served as first-rate instructors all week. Congratulations on a job well done.”

—Walter Runck, East Cooper Flotilla 070-12-06, SAT2025 Track 2.

“An amazing time. There was so much positive energy and encouragement. The Facilitators and Instructors were fantastic and extremely experienced. The students gained valuable knowledge and strengthened skills through hands-on, on-the-water instruction. They left feeling extremely excited, empowered and eager to help grow the AUXPAD program. I received my ACA instructor rating, which is pretty exciting. We want to promote safety and help save lives through education, training and positive examples. I was the first person to register for SAT2025 and plan to be the first for SAT2026. It’s great to be part of such an important program.”

—Natalie Bunting, Dania Beach Flotilla 070-03-09, Auxiliaryist of the Year 2023, SAT2025 Track 2.

And the Hosts Comment...

Spring AUXPAD Training was about saving lives. The national Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) mission is to reduce fatalities. The strategy is “to influence recreational boaters’ (paddlers’) behaviors.” Attendees learned to be more effective paddling influencers—focusing on life jacket wear, weather awareness, paddling sober, and the dangers of cold water as some of the primary themes. It was an honor to be part of SAT2025. I am super impressed by the time, hard work, and commitment that the Auxiliaryist planning team put into the event to ensure its “raging success.”

—Scott Szczepaniak

Many of the Auxiliaryists who attended SAT2025 in early May promoted paddlecraft safety later that same month as part of National Safe Boating Week. Several of the instructors taught Kayaking 101 classes to the public in their capacity as ACA Instructors, and others spoke to paddlers about life jacket wear, trip planning, and the importance of skills training for paddlers. We continue to strengthen our partnership with ACA through such outreach to novice paddlers.

—Roland McDevitt



2024 STATISTICS

U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

118 LIVES SAVED

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary continues to save lives through a commitment and dedication to maritime safety, search and rescue, and emergencies at sea.

1,651 NEW AUXILIARISTS

Each new recruit boosts our mission with fresh skills and dedication, enhancing our ability to protect and serve maritime communities.

18,822 TOTAL MEMBERS

This achievement highlights our role as force multipliers for Team Coast Guard and reflects our strengthened commitment to serving our communities.

1,002 MARINERS ASSISTED

Auxiliarists played a vital role in 2024 search and rescue missions, showcasing our swift response, commitment to maritime safety, and dedication as America's Volunteer Guardians.

\$9,633,979

VALUE OF PROPERTY SAVED VIA SEARCH AND RESCUE

Successfully protecting property worth millions of dollars through search and rescue operations, this accomplishment demonstrates the far-reaching impact of our work. Our actions showcase our role in managing critical situations and our ability to manage high-value assets.

80,030 VESSEL SAFETY CHECKS

Vessel Safety Exams help boaters improve safety by checking for required safety equipment.

118,220 PUBLIC AFFAIRS HOURS

Our strong public affairs efforts boost awareness, build partnerships, and reinforce our mission's global impact.

39,482 PUBLIC EDUCATION GRADUATES

Public Education promotes safe boating through essential courses and resources.

748 BOATS

Volunteer Auxiliary boats support missions like search and rescue, boosting Coast Guard capabilities, and waterway safety.

109 AIRCRAFT

Volunteer aircraft support missions such as search and rescue, forming a volunteer air force larger than those of 73 countries.

493 RADIOS

The Auxiliary's radio network supports Search and Rescue and maritime coordination, playing a vital role in national safety and security.

107,653 USCG OPERATIONAL SUPPORT HOURS

CG Operational Support hours consisting of missions, such as: Investigations, Watchstanding, Aids to Navigation, Radio Watchstanding, Station Crew Augmentation, Short Range-aerial Drones.

350 SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) ASSISTS

Auxiliarists assist distressed boaters on the waters of the United States, retrieving them from the water, towing their disabled vessels to safety, and preventing loss of life and property.

324,706 MEMBER TRAINING HOURS

Member training keeps volunteers skilled, mission-ready, and effective.



19,844 BOAT PATROL HOURS

Boat Patrols support search and rescue, training, and help safeguard waterways.

72,113 RBS PROGRAM VISITATIONS

Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) Visits by the Auxiliary promote safe boating through direct outreach, offering safety materials and guidance at marinas, dealerships, and public events.

14,401 CLERGY ASSISTANCE HOURS

Provides spiritual support, counseling, and guidance to service members.

12,087 U.S.C.G. RECRUITING HOURS

To support the "mission critical" priority of active duty recruiting, the Auxiliary's CGRS Division assists local and remote recruiting efforts as a true force multiplier.

9,120 HEALTHCARE SUPPORT HOURS

Assists in medical missions, providing care and health education to enhance well-being. Includes doctors, nurses, psychologists, and dentists who provide direct care and counseling to CG members.

38,355 CULINARY ASSISTANCE HOURS

Auxiliary Culinary Assistants keep Coast Guard station and cutter crews fed during missions, boosting morale and efficiency.

28,048 PADDLECRRAFT VESSEL SAFETY CHECKS

Paddlecraft Safety Exams check gear and offer tips to help paddlers stay safe.

4,676 INTERPRETER ASSISTANCE HOURS

Interpreters help bridge language gaps during missions, ensuring clear communication between the CG and boaters.

48,375 CG ADMIN SUPPORT HOURS

Admin Support streamlines CG operations through clerical, data, and logistics assistance.

44,938 MARINE SAFETY HOURS

Marine Safety protects waterways through inspections and environmental efforts.

CYBERSTORM 25

By R. Michael Stringer, AUXPA3

Florida: Sunshine State turned battleground.

Without warning, a freak supercell system explodes across the Florida peninsula, tornadoes rip through cities and towns like guided missiles. Power grids are fried, roads vanish under debris, and emergency services buckle under the strain.

But Mother Nature's fury is only the beginning.

Just as responders mobilize, a second strike hits: a coordinated cyber-attack detonates across the digital landscape. Cellular networks go dark. Internet dies. GPS is scrambled. Florida is cut off from the world—isolated, blind, and bleeding.

Panic ignites, law enforcement is scattered, rescue efforts stall, and the clock is ticking.

In the heart of the chaos, a team of emergency responders and unlikely heroes—volunteer radio operators—dust off analog gear and fire up old frequencies. They're the last line of communication. The only hope of holding the state together.



The **Cyberstorm 25** exercise is designed to evaluate the performance of Florida amateur and SHARES (SHARed RESources) High Frequency Radio Program networks during a simulated communications emergency. The SHARES Radio Network is a U.S. national emergency communication system managed by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) under the Department of Homeland Security. This is a statewide multi-county exercise involving Amateur Radio Emergency Service® (ARES®), Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS), and SHARES teams. The exercise is sponsored by the State of Florida and various Florida Counties/Divisions of Emergency Management.

The Exercise Plan (ExPlan) outlines the exercise overview, objectives with corresponding capabilities, assigned roles and responsibilities, logistics, schedule, and communications strategy. While certain materials are reserved exclusively for exercise planners, controllers, and evaluators, participants may access the portions relevant to their roles. The full ExPlan is available for review by all exercise participants.

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary actively participated in the Cyberstorm 25 statewide emergency communications exercise held on April 12, 2025. The exercise simulated a dual disaster scenario involving severe tornado outbreaks and a coordinated cyberattack that disrupted internet and cellular services across Florida. The Auxiliary's involvement was part of a broader effort to test and enhance communication capabilities during such emergencies.

While specific details of the Coast Guard Auxiliary's activities during the exercise are not publicly detailed, the exercise included various volunteer and agency communications teams, such as ARES and AUXCOM volunteer teams. Given the Auxiliary's expertise in maritime operations and emergency communications, their participation is typically focused on supporting communication efforts in affected areas.

This AI visual illustration was created to represent the vital role of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary communications teams during emergency situations. Whether through HF radio, VHF, or digital relay systems like WinLink, these dedicated volunteers help maintain critical communication links, ensuring the state and local EOCs stay connected when it matters most.



Expectations

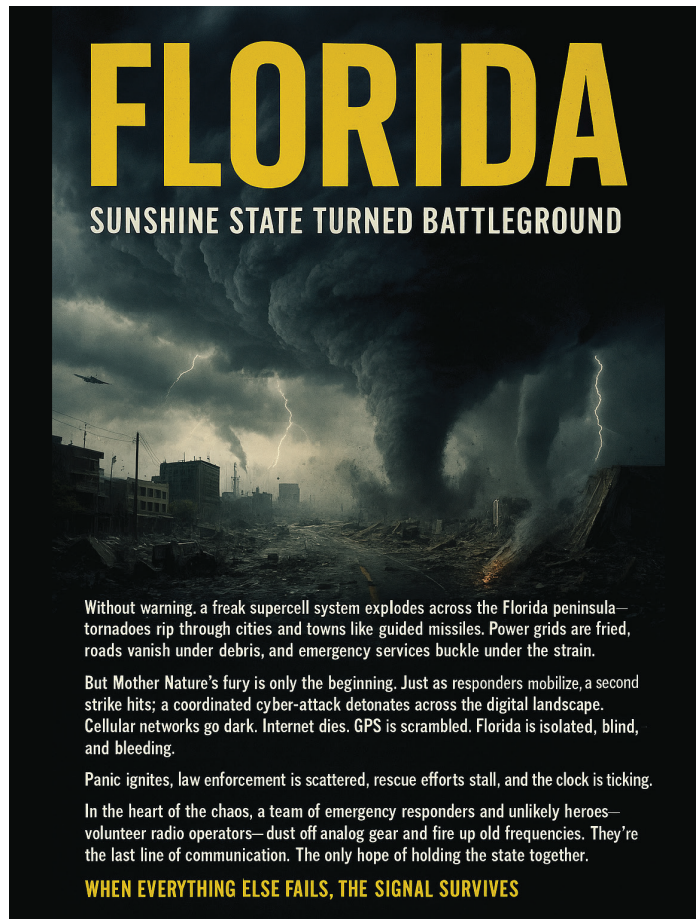
1. Ability to activate communication resources without traditional methods such as phone, text, or email.
2. Ability to communicate with state and other agency Departments of Emergency Management using only amateur or SHARES radio.
3. Ability to send structured messages by one or more techniques
 - A. To correctly utilize Incident Command System (ICS) forms for official messaging to the public.
 - B. Ability to gather and transmit situational utility reports from both agencies and individuals.
4. Ability to withstand loss of commercial electricity.
5. Interoperability, the ability of different systems, organizations, or units to work together effectively—sharing information, coordinating actions, and achieving common goals—without requiring significant adaptation.
6. Ability to withstand damage to radio assets such as antennas.

A Narrative of Operations at Ft. Lauderdale and Ft. Pierce Flotilla 58

At dawn, the first rays of sunlight crept across the docks and buildings of Flotilla 58 in Ft. Pierce, Florida. Across the expanse of Florida's eastern coastline, teams from Sector Miami were assembling, their mission clear: to participate in a communications exercise designed to test and expand their ability to keep the lines of communication open and the information flowing under extreme conditions.

By 1000, Operation Cyberstorm 25 was fully underway. Units at Flotilla 58 were already bustling with focused energy, their members coordinating checklists and running the last-minute diagnostics on radios and transmission equipment. These were not mere tests of hardware, but a living rehearsal for the unpredictable—hurricanes, disruptions, or large-scale emergencies. The goal: to ensure that when the unexpected strikes, lines of communication remain strong, bringing together teams into a unified and coordinated front. The command center there was a hive of organized chaos, as personnel navigated maps spread across tables, their fingers tracing routes and coverage zones. The city, known for its historic waterfront and strategic location along the Intracoastal Waterway, was a natural anchor for such operations.

Farther south, Ft. Lauderdale came alive with its own brand of urgency. As the clock struck ten, the appointed start time, both locations made their first attempts to reach out. The radios hissed to life—static at first, then the clear, clipped voices of operators identifying themselves by call signs, checking frequencies, and confirming protocols. Utilizing WinLink, a global radio-email



system operating on ham radio and government channels, a seasoned operator at Flotilla 58 in Ft. Pierce leaned into the mic and sent the first contact message, Inject #1. After a brief pause, a response crackled through—not from within Florida, but from a communications node hundreds of miles away in neighboring Georgia. The message was then relayed back to the Florida Emergency Operations Center (EOC), completing the communication loop.

This was the moment everyone had prepared for. The exercise's true value lay not in rehearsing for what was easy or familiar, but in pushing the boundaries of what could be accomplished under pressure. The teams switched frequencies, adjusting for interference and rerouting signals when weather or obstacles threatened clarity as redundant systems were brought online.

The mock movie poster AI image above was created to illustrate the vital role of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary communications teams during emergency situations.

WINLINK® is among the myriad of technologies utilized by the Auxiliary to facilitate communications during emergencies.

The Ft. Pierce team's efforts paid off, as they now managed to patch through to a remote node in Virginia and transmit Inject #2. The connection, though faint at first, stabilized as operators fine-tuned their gear. Messages were sent and relayed, each one a thread in the growing web of communication stretching beyond the state. Operators logged every detail, including signal strengths, timestamps, and any latency or garbled transmissions. The information would be invaluable for after-action reviews, revealing both strengths and areas for improvement.

Meanwhile, in Ft. Lauderdale, the combined efforts of experienced technicians and eager volunteers created an environment of learning and mentorship. Less experienced members shadowed veteran communicators, absorbing techniques for rapid troubleshooting and creative signal boosting. When a burst of static indicated an incoming message from a node in Alabama, the entire room cheered—a testament to the thrill of connection and the dedication behind it.

The aim was to demonstrate the reliability of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary communications capabilities—not only to the Coast Guard, but also to the State of Florida. The successful participation of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in this training mission underscores the critical role our communications systems play in supporting both state and federal response efforts.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary has been expanding its role in cybersecurity through initiatives like the AUXCYBER program, which enables qualified Auxiliarists to augment the Coast Guard's cyberspace workforce. This focus on cybersecurity aligns with the themes of the Cyberstorm 25 exercise, emphasizing the importance of resilient communication systems during cyber-related emergencies.



John Froehler, SO-CM (Division 5 Staff Officer-Communications), works on the radio during the Cyberstorm 25 exercise at Ft. Pierce Flotilla 58. USCG Auxiliary photo by R. Michael Stringer.



Mark Gaisford, ADSO-CM (Southeast District) coordinates communications at Ft Lauderdale for Cyberstorm 2025. USCG Auxiliary photo by R. Michael Stringer.





Leadership Development at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy

By Murray Price, DCOS, USCG Southeast District

The U.S. Coast Guard recently invited 16 Coast Guard Auxiliary District Chiefs of Staff (DCOS) to attend a week-long leadership program at the Leadership Development Center (LDC), located at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. This opportunity marks a significant step forward in the Auxiliary's approach to leadership development, and I was honored to be among those selected to participate.

A Warm Welcome at Yeaton Hall

From the moment we settled into our classroom inside Yeaton Hall, our group was met with genuine warmth and professionalism. The Academy grounds are immaculate, with manicured lawns, stately buildings, and the tranquil Thames River flowing along its edge. Tradition and a sense of purpose are woven into every detail of the campus.

Building Leadership Skills for the Auxiliary

The LDC program is designed to equip National Directorate leaders, including District Chiefs of Staff, with the tools and knowledge necessary to manage their responsibilities effectively and contribute to building a more cohesive and capable organization. Our class days were tightly choreographed and began with Captain Josh Fant, the Acting Academy Superintendent, who outlined the three core goals of the Leadership Development Center: Leadership Responsibility, Professionalism, and Character. This was followed by insightful discussions on Leading Self, Accountability, and Leading Teams and Others.



Dormitory and Honor Wall at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, New London Connecticut. USCG Auxiliary photo by Murray Price.

Real-World Training: From Near Miss to Bridge Simulator

One of the most impactful sessions featured Commander Justin Vanden Heuvel, who shared leadership lessons drawn from his 30-year career, including 19 years at sea aboard various cutters.

Before transitioning to a hands-on exercise, we viewed a computer-generated recreation of a near-miss incident in San Francisco Harbor. The presentation included a timeline showing vessel movements leading to the close-call mishap.

We then moved to one of the highlights of the week: the Academy's \$3.5 million Ship Bridge Simulator. This state-of-the-art training tool surrounds participants with more than a dozen large monitors disguised as bridge windows, providing a fully immersive experience of being underway in challenging sea conditions. As the scenario played out, the motion cues were so convincing that I nearly felt seasick—my eyes tricked by the sensation of movement.



Service, Reflection, and Emotional Intelligence

A recurring theme throughout the week was the Academy's unwavering commitment to service. Every aspect of the cadet experience is designed to instill the Coast Guard's core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

I was especially inspired by candid conversations with cadets, chief warrant officers, and both junior and senior officers, all of whom generously shared their leadership perspectives and management insights.

Our final day was a packed schedule. COMO Mary Kirkwood, National Commodore (NACO), was with us for the full classroom day and shared her background, her reason for joining the Auxiliary, and why she decided to offer even more personal time as she moved up in senior leadership culminating with her serving as our current NACO.

Our Auxiliary Senior Officer Course (ASOC) instructors—COMO Wally Smith, former Deputy National Commodore for Operations and the Pacific Area; COMO Susan Thurlow, former District Commodore of the USCG Great Lakes District-Central Region; and COMO Marion Parrish, former District Commodore of the USCG District Arctic District—each led final leadership sessions that were both insightful and forward-looking. One key takeaway was the expectation that every current Chief of Staff must submit a comprehensive Transition Plan, including a Gantt chart (a time-line based graphic), outlining how they intend to build and lead a team while preparing to seek election as District Commodore. COMO Kirkwood emphasized that aspiring to this role is not presumptuous; in fact, it is the very reason many of us sought the position of Chief of Staff in the first place.

We concluded the program with a reflective exercise focused on evaluating our own Emotional Intelligence and considering how these insights could help us grow as leaders—both within our districts and in



Auxiliary Senior Officer Course instructors introduce themselves to the ASOC class. From left, COMO Mary Kirkwood, National Commodore (NACO), LT Miranda Anderson, COMO Wally Smith, COMO Susan Thurlow, and COMO Marion Parrish. USCG Auxiliary photo by Murray Price.



Chief Warrant Officer 4 (CWO4) Morabito, and CWO4 Baldeza taking questions during the advanced leadership course. USCG Auxiliary photo by Murray Price.



Alexander Hamilton is widely recognized as the "father of the U.S. Coast Guard." In 1790, as the first Secretary of the Treasury, he established the Revenue Cutter Service to enforce customs laws, prevent smuggling, and protect the new nation's maritime interests. This service later merged with others to become today's Coast Guard. USCG Auxiliary photo by Murray Price.



Pioneering Innovation in Disaster Response: New River Valley Flotilla Leads the Way with GPS-Based Hazard Mapping

By Barry Denton, ANACO-FCd, AUXPA1

The 2024 Captain Niels P. Thomsen Innovation Award for Auxiliary Achievement presented to New River Valley Flotilla. Photo credit COMO Mary Kirkwood, NACO.

In a remarkable demonstration of innovation and interagency coordination, the New River Valley Flotilla has been honored with the 2024 Captain Niels P. Thomsen Innovation Award for Auxiliary Achievement for its groundbreaking work in disaster response through the development of a cloud-based debris field and hazard mapping system using GPS technology. This achievement came in response to Hurricane Helene, a significant natural disaster that posed a host of logistical and safety challenges.

Utilizing real-time GPS tracking, the flotilla created a scalable and efficient method for mapping debris fields and identifying hazards. This new methodology enabled rapid data collection and facilitated immediate information sharing among emergency response partners. The result was improved coordination, faster response times, and more accurate hazard assessments—key elements in effective disaster management. National Commodore Mary Kirkwood was quoted as saying, “This type of innovation and support is what makes the Coast Guard Auxiliary such a vital component of the Coast Guard and our protection of our waterways.”

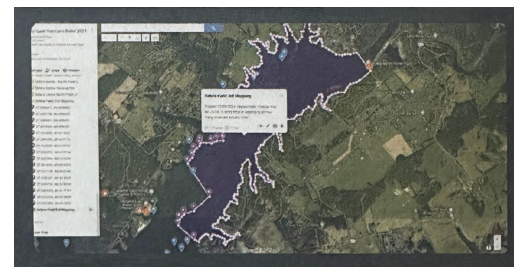
The success of this project lies not only in its technical execution but also in the collaborative efforts of the team involved. Team members included Benjamin Newby, who served as the Flotilla Staff Officer for Communications, Cameron Alemand, the Flotilla Commander of New River Valley Flotilla, and Steve Holcomb, Division Commander and Branch Chief for Response Directorate Relations. Benjamin Newby and John Krogmann, Deputy National Commodore of Recreational Boating Safety and Atlantic East, were present to receive the award.

The project developed by the New River Valley Flotilla has set a benchmark for Coast Guard operations, offering a replicable model that enhances disaster preparedness and response across the service. By integrating modern technology with strategic response planning, this effort represents a significant leap forward in emergency management and serves as an inspiring example of how innovation can save lives and protect communities.

This achievement not only showcases the technical capabilities within the Coast Guard Auxiliary but also highlights the power of our leadership and innovative engagement. The commitment of our members like those in the New River Valley Flotilla exemplifies the Auxiliary’s mission of supporting the Coast Guard through professionalism and a passion for public service.



2024 Captain Niels P. Thomsen Innovation Awards recipients. Photo by COMO Mary Kirkwood, NACO



The cloud-based GPS system which tracks debris fields and hazards. Photo credit COMO Mary Kirkwood, NACO.

Benjamin Newby receives the 2024 Captain Niels P. Thomsen Innovation Award for Auxiliary Achievement with Pat Feighery, VNACO, Mary Kirkwood, NACO, and John Krogmann, DNACO. Photo by COMO Mary Kirkwood, NACO.



U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

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



This Role Matters

THIS ROLE DIRECTLY SUPPORTS THE AUXILIARY'S NATIONAL IMAGE

YOUR GOOD WORK WILL BE SEEN ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND WILL HELP MAINTAIN THE PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE AND CREDIBILITY OF THE U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY.



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**.

Interested? Send 2 samples of your graphic work or portfolio link to:

jamal.d.lee@cgauxnet.us

Write in subject: **National Staff - Branding Position**

SEMPER PARATUS!



Drone Tech Revolutionizes Search and Rescue in Northern Michigan

“Skyline & Shoreline” Aerial Mobility Showcase Demonstrates the Future of Emergency Response

By Richard Lavanture, AUXPA3
Traverse City Flotilla 091-26-10

Photos by Cara Templeton, Traverse City Flotilla 091-26-10
Excerpts courtesy of Bill O’Brien, *Traverse City Record-Eagle*

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Operational Facility AUXPAT 1 gets a bird’s eye lookover from a military grade drone on West Grand Traverse Bay during the Skyline and Shoreline demonstration. Auxiliary photo by Cara Templeton.

TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN—May 6, 2025—The future of emergency response arrived over the waters of West Grand Traverse Bay, where more than 120 spectators gathered at Discovery Pier in Greilickville to witness the transformational power of drone technology in action.

The event—titled “Skyline & Shoreline: Aerial Mobility Showcase”—was Northern Michigan’s first large-scale demonstration of uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) applied to real-world search and rescue (SAR), environmental monitoring, and underwater mapping. Hosted by Traverse Connect, the showcase highlighted how aerial mobility is poised to revolutionize regional public safety efforts.

A powerful lineup of participants included a Blueflite 461 drone, a U.S. Coast Guard H-60 Jayhawk helicopter, and a Coast Guard Auxiliary facility, all featured in tightly coordinated live-action rescue simulations. The demonstrations also explored advanced applications of LiDAR scanning, water sampling, and Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB)-based distress signaling.

Simulated Rescue—Real-World Readiness

In one of the day’s most compelling simulations, the Blueflite 461 drone swiftly responded to a simulated distress call from the *AUXPAT1* Auxiliary training boat. Upon identifying the vessel, the drone deployed an EPIRB, which a Coast Guard rescue swimmer activated. The beacon’s signal triggered a rapid response from an H-60 Jayhawk helicopter launched from Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City and executed a precision rescue over water.

“The amount of innovation we’re doing here is awe-inspiring...”

—Commander Leo Lake, Operations Officer and Chief Pilot, U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Traverse City



Air Crew from USCG Air Station Traverse City participated in the emergency response demonstration including pilots CDR Leo Lake and LTJG Nicholas Betts, shown left. Auxiliary photo by Cara Templeton.

The multi-agency drill involved Coast Guard crew from Station Charlevoix, a rescue swimmer from Air Station Traverse City, and Dick Lavanture, Auxiliary coxswain aboard the responding vessel.

Drones Enhancing Safety, Efficiency

The showcase emphasized how drones can dramatically reduce response times, increase operational safety, and expand the capabilities of search and rescue teams. UAS platforms like the Blueflite 461 can deliver emergency supplies, relay location data, and map complex environments with minimal risk to human life.

Looking ahead, a follow-up demonstration is scheduled for 10 June on the East Arm of Grand Traverse Bay. This drill will feature an autonomous drone launching from two miles inland to conduct a blind SAR mission, reacting to a simulated EPIRB signal, locating the target, and coordinating with a Coast Guard helicopter to complete the mission.

Michigan at the Forefront

This groundbreaking initiative is supported by the Michigan Advanced Aerial Mobility Activation Fund, with key collaboration from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Northwestern Michigan College. The Traverse City region is quickly becoming a national leader in demonstrating how drone technology can seamlessly integrate into public safety operations.

During the event, Auxiliarists Dianne Walker, Jim DeKett and Jim Frick from Traverse City Flotilla 091-26-10 worked a display table distributing a wide variety of Coast Guard Auxiliary information for the public.

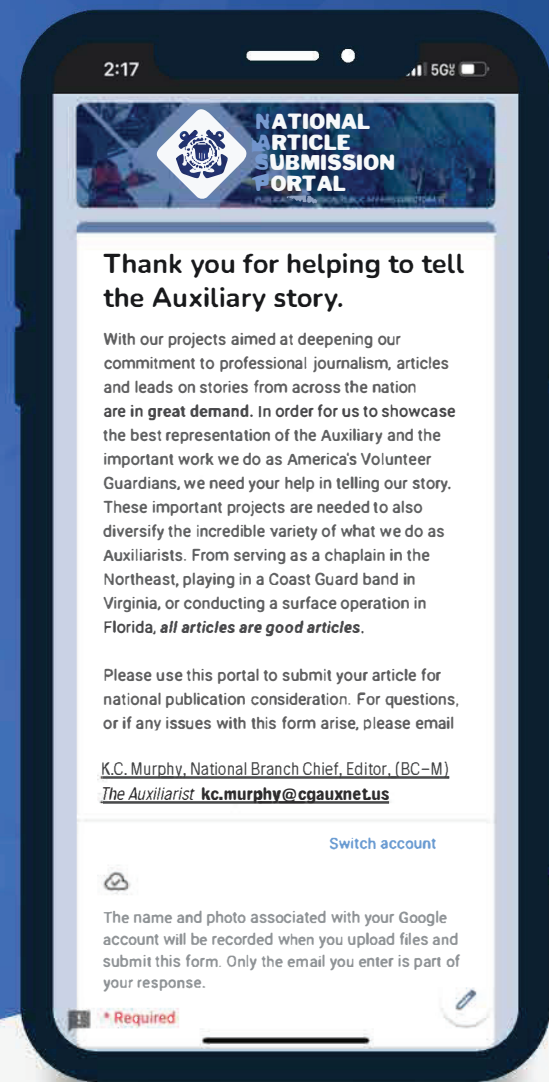
As the skies over Northern Michigan become more active with advanced aerial platforms, partnerships between government, academia, and private industry pave the way for a brighter, faster, and safer future in emergency response.



UAS platforms such as this Blueflite 461 can deliver emergency supplies, relay location data, and map complex environments with minimal risk to human life. Auxiliary photo by Cara Templeton.



Auxiliary OPFAC *AUXPAT 1* under the command of Richard Lavanture, coxswain with crew James Frisk rendezvous with a USCG H-60 Jayhawk helicopter from Air Station Traverse City.



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U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary District 7 Members Attend 45th Annual Ceremony of Honor and Remembrance

January 28, 2025, USCGC *Blackthorn* Memorial, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Article and Photos By Lisa Repetto, BA-M, *The Auxiliarist*

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary members representing USCG Southeast District gathered along with U.S. Coast Guard crew members, families, and supporters to pay their respects to the 23 fallen servicemen of the USCG Cutter *Blackthorn*. Murray Price, District Chief of Staff, USCG Southeast District, and Anthony Hooper, Division 7 Commander, placed a wreath at the memorial that stands to honor those who lost their lives. In addition to a wreath-laying, the commemoration featured a C-27 flyover by USCG Air Station Clearwater, an honor platoon, and the laying of roses for each *Blackthorn* victim.

On the night of January 28, 1980, the *Blackthorn*, returning to Galveston, Texas after a major overhaul in Tampa and with 50 crew members aboard, collided with the tanker SS *Capricorn* west of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge near Tampa Bay, Florida, claiming the lives of 23 Coast Guard personnel.

The annual event ensures that *Blackthorn's* story is never forgotten. Lessons from the incident led to improved safety protocols and training standards. The Coast Guard continues preservation efforts, maintaining the memorial, and raising awareness. The memorial itself fell over last year due to hurricane winds but was raised again, symbolizing resilience and the enduring legacy of those it honors.



Southern District Auxiliaries from Divisions 7, 8, and 11, at the *Blackthorn* memorial: Matthew Stephen, Toni Borman, Anthony Hooper, Kevin Wilcox, Paulette Parent, Christopher Juall, Matt Copeland, Lisa Repetto, Murray Price, and Stephan Bielawski. Image: U.S.C.G. Auxiliary



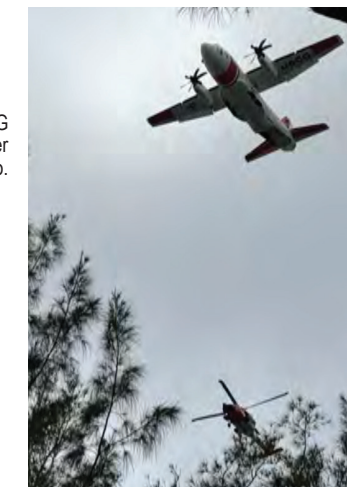
USCGC *Blackthorn* Memorial. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



RADM Douglas M. Schofield, Commander - U.S. Coast Guard Southeast District. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



CAPT Michael P. Kahle, Commander - USCG Sector St. Petersburg. Photo by Lisa Repetto.



Aerial Salute, USCG Air Station Clearwater. Photo by Lisa Repetto.





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Coast Guard Auxiliarist Earns Prestigious Cutterman Insignia

By Leon C. DeFulgentis, AUXPA2

Auxiliarist Dr. Sandy Dalton of Cape May Flotilla 82, New Jersey, has earned one of the most respected qualifications available to an Auxiliarist: the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Cutterman Insignia. The designation, awarded to only 26 Auxiliarists nationwide, recognizes sustained service, advanced qualifications, and operational excellence aboard Coast Guard cutters.

Clockwise from above: The Auxiliary Cutterman device. The ship's bell from USCGC *Heron* surrounded by the traditional elements used for the presentation ceremony. Dr. Dalton at the *Heron's* mast. Dr. Dalton being presented the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Cutterman device. Photos by Leon C. DeFulgentis, AUXPA2

A “cutter” is a Coast Guard vessel 65 feet or longer, built for extended missions at sea. These ships perform a wide range of critical duties, including search and rescue, law enforcement, and homeland security. The term “cutterman” refers to those who serve aboard these vessels with professionalism, dedication, and demonstrated expertise—qualities that are required not only of active-duty personnel but also of Auxiliarists seeking this rare qualification.



The Auxiliary Cutterman Insignia symbolizes an Auxiliarist’s deep commitment to the cutter fleet. To earn it, a candidate must serve a minimum of two years, spending at least 52 days per year aboard a cutter, including at least 24 days underway. Candidates must also complete rigorous Personal Qualification Standards (PQS) for damage control and watchstanding. This includes gaining in-depth knowledge of a cutter’s systems and emergency protocols, then passing an oral board and obtaining command approval to stand duty, often taking the place of a regular Coast Guard crew member.

Dr. Dalton’s service aboard the 87-foot coastal patrol boats USCGC *Heron* and USCGC *Mako* reflects this high level of commitment. She qualified as an In-Port Watchstander and served in support roles, including as an Auxiliary Culinary Assistant Specialist. Based at Station Cape May, *Heron* features modern navigation and propulsion systems and accommodates a crew of up to twelve.

The Cutterman Insignia was presented to Dalton in a formal ceremony on 22 May, 2025, at the Chief’s Club at USCG Training Center Cape May. The event was attended by active-duty personnel, fellow Auxiliarists, and Coast Guard Auxiliary leadership from USCG East District Northern Region. The certificate was signed by Commander Laura M. Moose, Director of Auxiliary for CGD-E-NR.

“Sandy exemplifies what it means to be an Auxiliarist,” said Executive Officer Sidoran of the *Heron*. “She’s always ready to learn and take on new responsibilities supporting the cutter community.” Commodore Noreen Schifini, District Commodore, CGD-E-NR added, “We are proud to have her in our district. Her dedication to the Coast Guard and the Auxiliary is outstanding.”

The Auxiliary Cutterman designation is a testament to the skill, sacrifice, and perseverance of those supporting the Coast Guard’s maritime mission. For an Auxiliarist to earn it is not only rare—it is a reflection of unwavering service to country and crew.



Exploring the Coast Guard Academy Admissions Partner Program

by Barry Denton, ANACO-FCd & Academy Admissions Partner



The United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) offers a unique opportunity for dedicated individuals to contribute to the future of the Coast Guard through its Admissions Partner Program (AAP). This volunteer initiative enlists members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, alumni, cadet parents, active-duty personnel, and other supporters to assist in identifying and mentoring prospective cadets. By leveraging the experiences and networks of these volunteers, the program enhances the Academy's outreach and recruitment efforts.

Admissions Partners serve as vital extensions of the Academy's admissions team, engaging in various activities to promote the Academy and guide potential candidates. Those selected are based on their geographical areas so that there is a presence throughout the United States. Their responsibilities include:

- **Attending College Fairs and High School Visits:** Partners represent the USCGA at educational events, providing information about academic programs, cadet life, and career opportunities within the Coast Guard. They also establish relationships with high school counselors and educators to identify promising students.

- **Conducting Applicant Interviews:** As part of the admissions process, Partners interview candidates in their local areas, offering insights into their suitability for the Academy and the broader Coast Guard mission. These interviews help assess applicants' leadership potential, commitment, and readiness for the challenges of Academy life.
- **Participating in Congressional Service Academy Events:** Although the USCGA does not require congressional nominations for admission, Partners attend events organized by congressional offices to provide information and answer questions about the Academy, ensuring comprehensive representation alongside other service academies.
- **Presenting Appointments at Ceremonies:** Partners may be called upon to present appointment certificates to accepted candidates during high school graduations or award ceremonies, formally recognizing their achievement and welcoming them into the Coast Guard family.
- **Supporting the Academy Introduction Mission (AIM) Program:** During the summer, Partners assist with the AIM program, a week-long immersive experience for high school juniors interested in the Academy. Their support includes logistical coordination and mentorship, helping participants gain a realistic understanding of cadet life. The Coast Guard Academy pays for all travel and lodging expenses for Academy Partners working at the summer AIM program.

Those interested in becoming Admissions Partners must follow a structured application process including:

1. **Application Submission:** Prospective Partners complete an application form available on the USCGA website, providing details about their background and motivation for volunteering.
2. **Partner training:** Once selected, Partners undergo training to familiarize themselves with the Academy's admissions procedures, programs, and messaging to ensure consistent and accurate representation.



3. **Commitment:** Certified Partners are expected to participate in at least two events annually or contribute a minimum of 20 hours of service to maintain their status. Activities are documented through the Academy's portal, known as the Bear's Den, and hours are recorded in the Auxiliary's data management system, AUXDATA II.

The Admissions Partner Program significantly amplifies the Academy's recruitment capabilities by:

- **Extending Geographic Reach:** Partners located across the country enable the Academy to connect with a diverse pool of candidates, including those in regions less frequented by admissions officers.
- **Providing Personalized Guidance:** Through one-on-one interactions, Partners offer mentorship and insights that help candidates navigate the admissions process and prepare for the rigors of Academy life.
- **Enhancing Community Engagement:** By involving a broad spectrum of volunteers, the program fosters a sense of community and shared purpose, strengthening the ties between the Academy and its supporters.

The Admissions Partner Program embodies the Coast Guard's commitment to excellence and service by enlisting dedicated volunteers to identify and cultivate the next generation of leaders. Through these efforts, Admissions Partners ensure that the USCGA continues to attract talented and motivated individuals ready to uphold the values and missions of the United States Coast Guard.



Photos provided by Bruce Talbot, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Academy Admissions Partner.

USCG Leadership Competency— Leading Self: Mentoring

Leadership competencies are the knowledge, skills, and expertise the Coast Guard and Auxiliary expect of their leaders. While there is some overlap in these competencies, they generally fall within four broad categories: Leading self, Leading others, Leading performance and change, and Leading the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Together, these four leadership categories and their elements are instrumental to career success. Developing them in all members of the Coast Guard team will result in the continuous improvement necessary for us to remain *Semper Paratus*.

- **Leading Self:** Fundamental to successful development as a leader is an understanding of self and one’s own abilities. This includes understanding one’s personality, values, and preferences, while simultaneously recognizing one’s potential as a member of the Coast Guard team. Personal conduct, health and well-being, character, technical proficiency, lifelong learning, followship, and organizational commitment are elements to consider when setting short and long-term goals focused upon the leadership development of “self.”
- **Leading Others:** Leadership involves working with and influencing others to achieve common goals and to foster a positive workplace climate. Auxiliarists interact with others in many ways, whether as supervisor, mentor, manager, team member, team leader, peer or worker. Positive professional relationships provide a foundation for the success of our Service. Showing respect for others, using effective communications, influencing others, working in teams, and taking care of one’s people are elements to consider when evaluating one’s capacity for leading others. Developing these qualities will increase capacity to serve.
- **Leading Performance and Change:** Members of the Coast Guard team constantly face challenges in mission operations. To meet these challenges, leaders must apply performance competencies to their daily duties. Performance competencies include developing a vision, managing conflict, quality and daily management of projects, appraising performance, problem solving, creativity, innovation, decision making, and customer focus. Having these competencies enables each leader—and the Service—to perform to the utmost in any situation.
- **Leading the Coast Guard Auxiliary:** As leaders gain experience in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, they must understand how it fits into a broader structure of the Coast Guard, government, and the nation as a whole. At a local level, leaders often develop partnerships with public and private sector organizations in order to accomplish the mission. The Coast Guard “plugs in” via its key systems: money, people, and technology and the Auxiliary supports Coast Guard activities. A leader must thoroughly understand these systems and how they interact with similar systems outside the Coast Guard. An awareness of the Coast Guard’s value to the nation and promoting that using a deep understanding of the political system in which an Auxiliarist operates becomes more important as one gets more senior. Leaders must develop coalitions and partnerships with allies inside and outside the Auxiliary.

To learn more, visit the Auxiliary Classroom and the Leadership Competency Series Portal to enroll in the courses. Click Here.



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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



National Safe Boating Week— The traditional country-wide kickoff to the annual Auxiliary safe boating outreach mission that reinforces the message that boating is fun but safer boating is more fun.

BACK COVER



Fireboat photo caption: USCG Air Station Miami conducts hoist operations with Miami Dade Fire Department Marine Unit. Auxiliary Photo by Joey Feldman, AUXPA3.



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