

Breeze

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

Winter 2025



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Cover photo: A Coast Guard HC-130H Hercules aircraft flies over "The Sentinel," a Division 11 facility; Tom Loughlin, coxswain. This photograph was taken during an airdrop practice mission and manipulated for Public Affairs purposes. USCG Auxiliary photograph by George Papabeis.

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 LCDR Benjamin Tuxhorn

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 Division 5Marcus Kiriakow
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 Division 9 John Montville
 Division 10 David Bird
 Division 11 Matthew Copeland
 Division 12 John Swink
 Division 13 David Green
 Division 14 Sean Flynn
 Division 15 Chester Bowman
 Division 16 Karl Peterson
 Division 17 Paul Thompson

FUTURE ISSUES OF BREEZE

Photos, stories, and updates are always welcome. Please send all submissions to DSO-PB for review via email to: dso.pb.d7@gmail.com

DEADLINE FOR ISSUE 1: Mar 10, 2026
 Breeze Editors: Dorothy Riley and Michael Stringer

DIRECTOR *of* AUXILIARY

Strengthening Our Future: Leadership Guidance for the Coast Guard Auxiliary



LCDR Benjamin Tuxhorn

Recently, Admiral Lunday released guidance for Coast Guard boards and selection panels for 2026, which provides valuable insights into the qualities of effective leadership. While not specifically directed at the Auxiliary, we need to reflect on these qualities to strengthen our commitment to the Coast Guard's missions. As we

look to the future, we must focus on identifying and cultivating individuals who embody the values and leadership necessary to excel in this vital partnership.

Core Values and Leadership

At the heart of our mission are the Coast Guard's Core Values: Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Auxiliarists must not only understand these values but also embody them in their actions—both on and off duty. Leadership transcends authority; it involves inspiring others to achieve mission objectives while prioritizing the well-being of those they lead. We seek individuals who demonstrate integrity, courage, and humility, those who stand up for their teammates and prioritize the duty to serve above personal interests.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Auxiliarists should be lifelong learners, eager to gain knowledge and apply it in diverse contexts. They should pursue mastery in their primary area of expertise while remaining open to developing skills in secondary specialties. This adaptability is crucial for addressing evolving challenges that demand innovative solutions. Auxiliarists should exhibit a drive

to take initiative and deliver results, demonstrating a willingness to challenge assumptions and the status quo.

Physical and Mental Readiness

Auxiliarists must prioritize both physical and mental readiness, recognizing that their well-being directly influences their effectiveness as leaders. A commitment to a healthy lifestyle sets a positive example for others and ensures we are prepared to meet the demands of our missions.

Potential for Greater Responsibility

In evaluating Auxiliarists, we must focus on those who demonstrate potential for increased authority and accountability. Ideal Auxiliarists should aspire to command or significant leadership roles at the flotilla, division, district, or national levels, demonstrating a commitment to serving something greater than themselves. They should possess the energy and bias for action necessary to contribute meaningfully to the Coast Guard's mission.

Selecting the Best for the Future

The selection of Auxiliary members for leadership roles should prioritize merit, emphasizing demonstrated leadership, performance, and potential for future service. In our efforts to build a strong and capable Auxiliary, let us collaborate to identify individuals who embody these essential characteristics. By doing so, we ensure that our organization remains ready and resilient, capable of supporting the Coast Guard's vital missions.

In conclusion, as we continue our essential work in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to excellence and in adhering to our core values. Together, we can cultivate a culture that values leadership, continuous improvement, and unwavering commitment to our core values.

Thank you for your dedication to the mission and for your ongoing efforts to support the Coast Guard.

LCDR Benjamin Tuxhorn
Director of Auxiliary,
Southeast District

Operations Training Officer

Thank you all for your exceptional dedication to our service, our nation, and to our members and their families. I am both humbled and proud to serve alongside each of you. Although our office is small compared to the Auxiliary force we support, the CGD-SE Director of Auxiliary (DIRAUX) office remains highly motivated by your wage-free professionalism to provide the level of support you deserve. Our services would not meet the high standards required without the Auxiliary members who serve as DIRAUX administrative assistants. We are committed to delivering the best support possible and are continuously working to improve our processes. Please share any feedback through your chain of leadership.

Surface Operations Training

One of the highlights of my role as Operations and Training Officer (OTO) is getting underway and seeing your knowledge, skill, and professionalism firsthand. These opportunities reflect the high level of capability the Auxiliary brings to Coast Guard missions.

I want to emphasize the importance of using drill sheets—our standardized evaluation tools for designated underway tasks. These sheets help each crew member and the crew as a whole meet national standards. Coxswains and crew **must** use them when completing training and annual currency maintenance. This includes the use during qualification examination (QE) check-rides. Every facility owner and coxswain is encouraged to keep a set of laminated, easy-to-reference evaluation sheets on board at all times.

Drill sheets and other boat-crew resources can be found here: [Boat Crew and QE Resources](#)

Operations

With the Continuing Resolution #1 now in effect, we are funded for operations through **January 30th**. Funds have been loaded into the accounting lines for patrol orders. You may request, and the Order Issuing Authorities (OIA) may approve patrol

orders up to that date. I will send supplemental guidance to the OIA when updates occur; Auxiliary leadership will disseminate that guidance to you.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment (PPE) funding for this fiscal year has not yet been secured. Last year, we spent **\$103k** on PPE and had an additional **\$42k** in purchase requests (PR) carried over into this fiscal year. Those PRs will be prioritized once funding is secured. If your flotilla needs PPE, please work through your rescue and survival systems officer to request procurement through your station. The station or sector OIA initiates the procurement request for Auxiliary PPE.

Please note that aviation PPE funding is not provided to our office as is our surface ops funding. Therefore, PRs for aviation PPE do not go through our office. You must work with your Air Station command to request PPE.

Thank you again for the outstanding professionalism you continuously demonstrate in our volunteer service.

Semper Paratus!
CWO3 Brook L. Blount
Auxiliary Operations Training Officer
USCG District Southeast (CGD-SE)



CWO3 Brook L. Blount,
Southeast District Operations
Training Officer

BRIDGE NOTES

2025 Year in Review and Looking Ahead to 2026

2025 was a year of tempo, transition, and transformation for the Southeast District Auxiliary. From the very beginning, our leaders at every level leaned into their new roles with a clear sense of purpose: support the Coast Guard, serve our communities, and take care of our members. District, division, and flotilla leadership teams settled in quickly, supported by coaching, mentoring, and deliberate transition planning. That early investment paid off throughout the year as new leaders moved from figuring things out to driving real progress in their areas of responsibility.

One of the year's most important accomplishments was the rollout of the **2025–2026 District Strategic Plan** (<https://cgauxsoutheast.org/wp/?s=strategic+plan>). Built to align with the National Strategic Plan and Coast Guard priorities, the plan gave everyone, from flotilla staff officers to district leaders, a shared framework for what we are trying to achieve and why. It set clear priorities around Recreational Boating Safety, member engagement and growth, deeper integration into Coast Guard operations, and innovation and future readiness. To keep the plan from becoming just another document, we stood up Strategic Advisory Groups and task force teams. These small, focused groups of subject-matter experts were tasked with turning strategy into practical guidance: closing policy gaps, drafting SOPs, identifying risks, and recommending changes so that our structure, processes, and training keep pace with the work we are being asked to do.

Training was another defining theme for 2025. Rather than relying solely on a single annual district training event, we pushed training closer to where members live and serve. Sector Training events (S-TRAINS) were planned and conducted across the district, bringing qualification courses, workshops, and leadership development to members who might not be able to travel long distances to our annual conference.

These events became powerful “on ramps” for new and aspiring boat crews, marine safety specialists, communicators, and staff officers. At the same time, our district D-TRAIN remained the flagship event of the year. It brought together a wide range of courses and workshops in one place: everything from surface operations and marine



COMO Martin Goodwin, CGD-SE



CWO3 Brook Blount, Southeast District Operations Training Officer, USCG, presents a segment at S-TRAIN conducted in Miami on Feb. 22 2025. USCG Auxiliary photo by Gustavo Montano.

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Dean Bell, coxswain, a member of Division 7, watches a C-130 Hercules approach as it prepares to make a drop to the Auxiliary facility before dawn in Tampa Bay. USCG Auxiliary photo by George Papabeis.

safety to AUXDATA, leadership, and more. Strong attendance, high-quality instruction, and a positive atmosphere, reinforced by a strong undercurrent of fellowship and camaraderie, turned D-TRAIN into both a learning experience and a morale booster.

Operationally, the Southeast District maintained a demanding tempo across surface, air, and communications missions. Surface facilities logged extensive hours on the water supporting maritime patrols, safety zones, and special operations such as Operation Dry Water and high-profile local initiatives. Divisions hosted successful Boat Crew Colleges and training weekends, helping members qualify and requalify while reinforcing risk management and standardization. In the air, AUXAIR continued to be a decisive force multiplier for the Coast Guard, particularly in support of Air Stations and Sectors that rely on Auxiliary aircrews to extend their reach. Even when funding or operational pauses affected certain missions, our aircrews remained ready, stepped in for urgent needs, and demonstrated the value of an effective, professional aviation program.

Communications and emergency management also saw important advances. AUXCOM teams supported routine nets and exercises while maintaining contingency readiness for hurricanes and other major incidents. District-wide drills, such as Everbridge accountability exercises and participation in larger events like CYBERSTORM, helped validate our readiness to operate in disrupted environments. These activities did more than test our systems; they gave us a realistic picture of

where our processes, contact data, and response expectations needed tightening, leading directly to updates to plans and procedures.

Recreational Boating Safety remained at the heart of what we do. Public Education classes, Vessel Safety Checks, and Program Visitor activity stayed strong throughout the year, with many divisions reporting robust course throughput and steady demand for both in-person and hybrid offerings. National Safe Boating Week once again served as a focal point for outreach across all six Sectors. Auxiliarists staffed events at marinas and boat ramps, supported media campaigns, engaged with local and state officials, and reached thousands of boaters in person and online. These efforts were complemented by creative partnerships with schools, youth programs, and local organizations that helped us reach new audiences and plant seeds for future membership.

Recruiting and retention efforts continued to evolve as well. Many units experimented with new approaches, from “first 30–40 days” onboarding sprints to targeted outreach at air shows, boat shows, and civic events designed to show new members how to get involved quickly and meaningfully. Mentorship at the flotilla level, proactive follow-up with less active members, and visible recognition for outstanding performance all helped sustain engagement. The growing use of youth and collegiate programs, including Auxiliary University Program and Aux Scout partnerships, created new pathways into service, broadening our pipeline and aligning us with future generations of leaders.



Sea Scouts participate in Safety at Sea at the Fort Pierce Coast Guard Station. USCG Auxiliary photograph.

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Perhaps the most forward-looking aspect of 2025 was our embrace of technology and innovation. One of the most visible changes was the rollout of our modern, member-centric district website over the summer. Rather than being a static repository of documents, the new website is built around how members actually search and work. It offers clear entry points for new members, new leaders, and seasoned Auxiliarists looking for specific guidance. Over time, it will become the central hub that connects everything else we're building, including AI tools, dashboards, SOP libraries, training calendars, and communications. New technological innovations are also being leveraged throughout our district. One shining example is the boat-training simulator, acquired through grant funding in Flotilla 84, Sarasota. This simulator provides advanced training and recruiting capabilities and serves as a potential district-wide model for future training and community outreach.

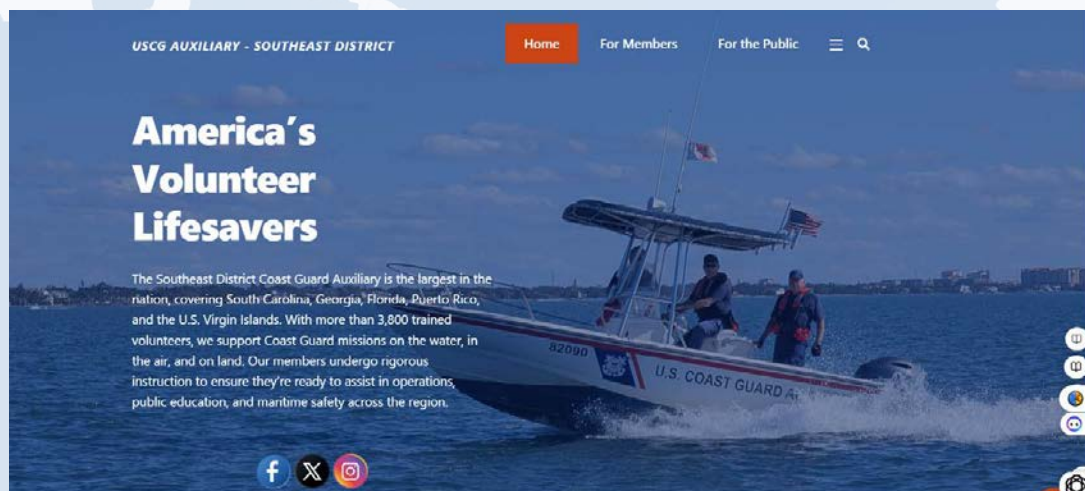
Some of the most impactful technology integration happened behind the scenes, as we began organizing our policies, SOPs, and district guidance in a way that could be leveraged by AI. We took early steps toward building an AI-enabled knowledge assistant for the district, one that responds conversationally to member questions while pointing them straight to the underlying, authoritative documents. These efforts were grounded in Department of Homeland Security guidance on generative AI and aligned with emerging Auxiliary initiatives, positioning the Southeast District as an AI leader in the Auxiliary.

All of this took place against a backdrop of deeper integration with our Coast Guard partners. Auxiliary presence at Sector events, Air Station activities, rocket launches, ceremonies, and unit-level support missions reinforced the message that we are an integral part of Team Coast Guard. Fellowship activities, chaplain visits, and recognition events underscored our commitment not only to our

missions but to the morale and well-being of those we serve alongside. District-level recognition, from awards for inspirational leadership to national-level acknowledgments, highlighted the remarkable efforts of our members and units and helped tell our story beyond our own boundaries.

Taken together, 2025 revealed a district that is not only busy but intentional: investing in leadership, aligning with strategy, modernizing how we work, and always keeping our focus on service and people.

As we look ahead to 2026, that momentum gives us a strong platform for an ambitious yet focused set of priorities. The AI initiative we began in 2025 will move from proof of concept to daily practice. Our goal is simple: make it easier and faster for members to get accurate answers. Instead of hunting through dozens of websites and files, a



The new Southeast District website is no longer a static repository of documents, but is built around how members actually search and work. Be sure to visit it often: <https://cgauxsoutheast.org/wp/>

flotilla commander or staff officer can request guidance on tasks and procedures and receive a plain-language explanation along with links back to the official documents. The Southeast District is the model for AI implementation and is leading the way in designing the national AI framework to leverage the power of AI to serve the entire organization, ensuring all members benefit from accurate and reliable program and policy guidance.

Dashboards will be another major focus. We already collect a tremendous amount of data through reports and systems; 2026 will be about turning that data into insight. District and sec-

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tor-level dashboards will help leaders visualize mission hours, training pipelines, recruiting and retention trends, and the status of open issues. At the division and flotilla level, simple, easy-to-read views will help leaders quickly see where they are thriving, where they may need help, and where targeted action could make the biggest difference. Operational dashboards will give active-duty command centers a real-time view of Auxiliary patrol and communications assets across the Southeast District. Surface, air, and radio facilities will be displayed on a common operating picture, showing current status, location, crew, and mission assignment at a glance. This shared information will allow watchstanders to see where Auxiliary capability is available, make faster and more informed tasking decisions, and coordinate multi-unit responses more effectively. By integrating Auxiliary data into the same decision space used by active-duty operators, these dashboards will deepen operational trust and enable the Auxiliary to become an even more agile and responsive force multiplier. Over time, these dashboards will become a shared “instrument panel” for the district, helping us prioritize resources and measure results more consistently.

To support all of this, we are rethinking how we communicate. Members have been clear: they want timely, clear communication that is not overwhelming. In 2026, we'll work toward a more predictable rhythm of routine district updates, concise directorate messages, and clearly labeled “action required” items, paired with a better alignment between email, Everbridge, the district website, and social media. The goal is that a member hears a consistent message no matter which channel they use, and that important information is easy to find when it's needed, not buried in an inbox.

Standard Operating Procedures will sit at the center of this new communications and knowledge ecosystem. The work of our Strategic Advisory Groups and DSOs will continue with a renewed focus on the topics that create the most confusion for unit leaders: membership actions, elections, waivers, proctoring, recruiting, and more. Each new SOP is written with clarity and usability in mind, posted to the website, indexed for AI, and integrated into relevant training courses. We are also moving toward a more deliberate lifecycle for SOPs, so outdated or conflicting guidance can be

retired, reducing the friction members experience when encountering multiple versions of similar documents.

Training will also evolve. Building on the success of both S-TRAINS and D-TRAIN, we will begin shaping what we might think of as “mega D-TRAINS”, events that bring together surface rodeos, communications labs, AUXAIR activities, leadership development courses, and specialty training under one coordinated umbrella. The goal is not simply to make D-TRAIN bigger, but to make it more integrated and more valuable, particularly for members who invest significant time and money to attend. Hybrid training models, pre-D-TRAIN online academies, and better alignment between S-TRAIN content and D-TRAIN capstone events will help ensure that members arrive ready to complete qualifications and return home equipped to lead and train others.

Finally, 2026 will see the continued development of Auxiliary involvement with Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) projects and other emerging technologies. As the Coast Guard refines its own small UAS program, we will work with our active-duty partners to define where and how Auxiliary talent can best be employed. That means identifying members with Part 107 certification, aviation or operational experience, and the right equipment; designing a concept of operations that fits within Coast Guard frameworks; and exploring appropriate mission sets where UAS can add value. At the same time, we will keep pushing forward with tools like the boat-training simulator and upgraded communications systems, ensuring that our members have access to modern capabilities that sharpen their skills and amplify their impact.

If 2025 was about setting direction, building structures, and proving what's possible, 2026 will be about integration and simplification, making it easier for members to serve, lead, and succeed. We will keep our focus where it has always belonged: on our missions, our members, and our partnership with the Coast Guard and the communities we're privileged to serve.

Semper Paratus,

Martin Goodwin

District Commodore

STAFF BRIEFINGS

Dear Members of our Southeast District,

As we gather with family and friends during this holiday season and reflect on the year behind us, I extend my sincere gratitude to each of you for the dedication, professionalism, and spirit of service you brought to the Coast Guard Auxiliary throughout 2025.

This year demonstrated our resilience, innovation, and collective impact across Logistics, Prevention, and Response. I offer special thanks to our District Staff Officers for helping make our district an exceptional place to serve alongside the U.S. Coast Guard. From culinary support to materials management, your efforts ensured that our members had the uniforms, resources, and supplies needed to carry out their missions. Even when faced with shortages or staffing gaps, flotillas responded with creativity and commitment to keep operations moving.

Our specialized members advanced the district's digital capabilities by developing new webpages and the AUX GIS system, which now allows authorized users, including USCG Command Centers—to track our vessels, aircraft, and communications trailers while under orders. At the same time, our Information Services leaders worked tirelessly to keep members current on training and inspections, ensuring that qualifications remained valid and readiness never wavered.

Human Resources welcomed hundreds of new Auxiliaries and honored the dedicated service of those who retired. Every new member strengthens our mission, and every retiree leaves a legacy that continues to guide and inspire us.

I also want to recognize our members from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to South Carolina and every place in between. Your work in delivering navigation courses, hosting safety fairs, and performing vessel examinations reached thousands of boaters, students, and community partners. Through social media outreach, public workshops, and participation in parades and festivals, you amplified our message of safety and service. The continued publication of *Breeze* further highlighted our achievements and strengthened our sense of community.

Our Navigation Services, Marine Safety, Public Education, Vessel Examination, Program Visitor, and Aux Scout programs thrived throughout the year. You educated thousands of boaters, monitored waterways, ex-

amined vessels, and mentored youth—efforts that reflect the very core of our prevention mission: protecting lives before danger arises.

Despite funding constraints and operational challenges, our Surface and Aviation programs stayed firmly focused on mission execution. Patrols, joint training events, and Search and Rescue coverage demonstrated our operational reliability and professionalism. Forward-leaning initiatives such as AIS vessel tracking and the Operations Dashboard showcased our commitment to modernization and readiness.

As we celebrate the holidays, let us also remember our active duty, reserve, civilian, and Auxiliary shipmates who will stand the watch so others may enjoy this season in safety. Their service reminds us of the enduring importance of our mission.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will continue to grow, innovate, and serve. By maintaining our focus on member satisfaction, training, and outreach, we will build on the successes of 2025 and move confidently into the new year. Together, we will strengthen our programs, expand our partnerships, and ensure that the Southeast District remains a benchmark of excellence.

May this holiday season bring peace, joy, and renewal to you and your loved ones.

Semper Paratus — Always Ready.

Very respectfully,

Murray Price

Southeast District Chief of Staff



Murray Price, DCOS, CGD-SE

*Southeast District's 2025 Commodore Donald L. Frasch
Inspirational Leadership Award*



Diane Pollock

Southeast District Members,

It is my distinct honor and genuine pleasure to announce that Diane Pollock, Flotilla Commander of Flotilla 14-1, Amelia Island, Florida, has been selected as the Southeast District's 2025 Commodore Donald L. Frasch Inspirational Leadership Award recipient.

This prestigious honor is presented to the Flotilla Commander who exemplifies the highest standards of leadership and service, demonstrating sustained excellence, exceptional proficiency, unwavering integrity, and impeccable bearing throughout the year. Commander Pollock's dedication to mission excellence, her mentorship of fellow members, and her tireless commitment to fostering engagement within her flotilla stand as an inspiration to us all and reflect the very best traditions of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

As the district honoree, Flotilla Commander Pollock will be submitted as the Southeast District's nominee for the National Commodore Charles Greanoff Inspirational Leadership Award. We also extend heartfelt congratulations and sincere thanks to our other outstanding nominees, whose exceptional service and leadership have greatly enriched their flotillas and our district:

Gary Kessler, Flotilla 44, Daytona Beach
Charlene Dykman, Flotilla 39, Dania Beach

Each of these leaders has demonstrated the highest levels of dedication, integrity, and inspiration to their members and communities. Their contributions continue to advance our shared mission and strengthen the fabric of Team Coast Guard across the Southeast District. Please join me in congratulating Diane Pollock, Flotilla Commander, on this well-deserved recognition and in thanking all of our nominees for their exemplary leadership and service.

Very respectfully,

Martin

Martin S. Goodwin
District Commodore
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Southeast District

Enthusiasm - Engagement - Excellence

Coast Guard Auxiliary: Training for Life-Saving Missions

By Karen Miller, DCAPT-W

When Seconds Count, Precision is Everything

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. We’re taking on water and are in danger of sinking. Our position is offshore of Miami.”

Powerful distress calls like this demand split-second precision from Coast Guard teams. On a routine law enforcement patrol, a C-130 crew intercepted the above call, pinpointed the stricken boat, and executed a flawless rescue. The pump’s trail line landed squarely across the deck. Within ten minutes, the grateful boaters restored power using fuel from the pump package, stabilized their vessel, and limped safely to port.

A second incident tested every inch of the team’s skill. Three fishermen from Venice, Florida, failed to return after a day on the water. Search efforts by C-130 crews and H-60 helicopters came up empty—until a civilian plane spotted the exhausted men adrift in the open Gulf. A C-130 dropped a survival raft near them; they climbed aboard, and an H-60 helicopter completed the rescue just 45 minutes later.

These rescues demonstrate the difference precision training makes. Coast Guard aircrews practice relentlessly, knowing every drop, every maneuver could become a matter of life or death.

A Partnership Born of Necessity

With homeland security missions placing greater demands on active-duty personnel, Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater has turned to an unlikely but invaluable partner: the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Since 2001, this partnership has grown stronger each year. Today, C-130 crews conduct drop prac-

tice at least twice a week, supported by Auxiliary operational facilities from Divisions 11, 7, and 8.

This partnership is more than efficient—it’s transformative. Critical maritime emergencies demand peak proficiency, and these joint trainings ensure aircrews stay sharp while freeing Coast Guard personnel and vessels for other vital missions.

Everyone benefits; mission readiness improves across the board.

Training Under Pressure

One evening during the early years of the partnership, an Auxiliary operational facility arrived on scene at 5:45 p.m. for a typical drop exercise. Six miles offshore in the Gulf, just before sunset, the crew from Flotilla 11-1, Clearwater—led by Coxswain Karen Miller and accompanied by two Petty Officers from the Air Station—prepared for the evolution.

“Not the nicest conditions to be out in the Gulf at dusk,” Miller recalled. Three to four-foot seas rolled beneath them, with occasional five-footers, while 15-knot winds whipped across the water.

The C-130 began with a smoke flare drop. After running a racetrack pattern for approximately five minutes, the crew deployed a canister simulating a dewatering pump, complete with a parachute and more than 400 feet of trailing line. It landed within feet of the smoke flare. At the pilot’s signal, the Auxiliary crew retrieved and stowed the canister and parachute, then readied for the next phase.

The next step raised the stakes: retrieving larger survival kits. Two more smoke flares dropped in quick succession, serving as alignment



Screen grab from cell phone video. Image by Ray Stefanski.

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markers for the 1,000-foot MA-3 kit (a large survival package containing a raft and supplies) that followed. The Auxiliary crew successfully retrieved and stowed this equipment as well.

Precision Under Pressure

The next phase tested both aircrew and boat crew under challenging conditions. The C-130 would drop a message block (a small, weighted container used for immediate communication) to the moving vessel—the rough seas prevented the boat from coming to a dead stop without risk of capsizing.

After verifying the boat's highest point at 18 feet (including the antenna), the pilot lined up his approach from the east, descending to just 68 feet at 130 knots. The message block—a plastic envelope roughly five by seven inches with a small sandbag and 20 feet of yellow streamer—deployed and landed within one foot of the boat's motor.

Impressive as that was, the pilot wasn't satisfied. He advised the crew to stand by for another pass, then brought the massive C-130 around under identical conditions. This time, the message block fell directly into the outstretched hands of a crewmember standing on deck.

The planned final phase—deploying logs with polypropylene line or a series of rafts—had to be cancelled due to technical considerations aboard the C-130. The facility returned to base.

The Reward

Despite the physical demands and occasional difficulties of these exercises, Auxiliary crews consistently return to port energized and eager for the next mission.

"It makes us proud to be part of Team Coast Guard," Miller said, summing up what her crew feels after each training evolution.

Their pride is well-earned. Every practice drop, every challenging evolution in rough seas, builds the muscle memory and precision that saves lives when real distress calls come in. The partnership between the Coast Guard and its Auxiliary volunteers ensures that when someone transmits that dreaded "Mayday," highly trained crews are ready to respond—with the skills and confidence that only rigorous, realistic training can provide. Team Coast Guard is trained and ready to help. Ω



Top down:

C-130 Message Drop – HC-130 Hercules flying 50 feet above the Auxiliary facility (68 feet total height above the water).

C-130 flying over the Auxiliary facility.

Back at the dock, all the gear was ready to be returned to Air Station Clearwater.

A pump can be seen next to a Mark-50 flare. USCG Auxiliary photos by Karen Miller.



Behind the Screens: An Auxiliarist's Role in Coast Guard **CYBERSECURITY**

By Lisa Repetto

“Cybersecurity is the practice of protecting your critical systems, data, and networks from digital attacks.”

- Source: Microsoft (quoted by Scott Kostreba)



Auxiliarists in the Cyber Domain

Many Auxiliarists serve as vessel examiners, program visitors, culinary assistants, instructors, crew members, and more. In addition to these familiar missions, the Auxiliary also supports the Coast Guard mission in the cyber domain.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary Cybersecurity Directorate (AUXCYBER) began as a mission about 10 years ago. Their webpage tagline, “SECURE - PROTECT - DEFEND,” could be appropriate for a military battalion, but it is clearly a virtual reference. Their website explains:

“We are responsible for a full spectrum of information and cybersecurity services within the Auxiliary. Our divisions are comprised of complementary branches staffed by Auxiliarists bringing significant pro-

fessional experience from the public, private, and academic sectors.”

Their mission is to proactively protect Coast Guard Auxiliary Information Technology (IT) assets, respond to cybersecurity incidents, deliver cybersecurity awareness and educational materials to Auxiliarists, and partner with the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Cyber Command to plan, staff, and execute cybersecurity support.

Meet Southeast District Auxiliarist Scott Kostreba

Scott Kostreba, Auxiliary Cybersecurity Division Chief, has been an active member of Flotilla 11-1, Clearwater, since 2018, serving in both division and flotilla staff officer positions. He also served as Flotilla Vice Commander and is a certified Telecommunications Officer (TCO) and Vessel Examiner (VE). Scott served 4 years on active duty in the U.S. Coast Guard and grew up in Clearwater. In June 2025, Scott retired from his position as Senior Information Technologist for the Pinellas County, Fla., Sheriff's Office after 39 years of service.

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Scott has an extensive background in cybersecurity, having spent the last 15 years conducting audits at the Sheriff's Department. He served as the local agency security officer, working as part of a team of technology information experts. These audits, required by the FBI and administered by the Florida Dept of Law Enforcement (FDLE), are referred to as CJIS Audits (Criminal Justice Information Systems), and require government agencies to meet a specific standard. As an information technologist, Scott noted: "Some of my responsibilities involved firewall management, threat mitigation, and network infrastructure support."

How Scott Joined AUXCYBER

Given Scott's extensive background in cybersecurity, there was no formal mechanism to connect Scott to Auxiliary Cybersecurity. I asked Scott how he became aware of Auxiliary cybersecurity. His response:

"It was a phone conversation with [former Auxiliary] Dick Erwin." During the phone call, as Scott explains, "Dick said, 'Hey, the Coast Guard really needs help with cybersecurity because they are now required to do cybersecurity audits and inspections. Would you be interested in going to Sector St. Petersburg and helping out?' Scott responded, "Absolutely, I would love to do that!"

Subsequently, Scott met Mike Pierno, a Coast Guard civilian Marine Transportation Security Specialist – Cybersecurity (MTSS-C), at Sector St. Petersburg, Fla., where a productive meeting between two former Coast Guard active-duty members took place, and the connection was instant. Soon after this meeting, Scott joined the team as an Auxiliary cybersecurity advisor, conducting cybersecurity inspections, reviewing security plans, discussing compliance at vendor facilities, and assisting with staff training. This directorate was a perfect fit for Scott, and he was soon appointed Branch Chief – Cybersecurity Prevention Operations (BC-YVO).

Roles and Responsibilities

Scott has several roles; locally, he serves as an Auxiliary cybersecurity advisor, and his responsibilities include:

"Reviewing Coast Guard security policies for compliance and providing advice on correctly adhering to these policies; providing answers on stakeholder audits (vendors and facilities); helping interpret and responding to audit instructions and responses. In conjunction with the MTSS-C, an Auxiliary cyber advisor can assist an IT specialist with cybersecurity as well."

Recently, the Coast Guard enacted new cybersecurity requirements for port stakeholders (vendors and facilities), and the need to provide additional cyber support is skyrocketing. As Scott mentions: "Auxiliary cyber advisors are currently in 13 sectors around the country and growing rapidly." In addition to Coast Guard and Auxiliary personnel, civilian contractors and other resources are used to meet Coast Guard cybersecurity requirements successfully.



As an Auxiliary Cybersecurity advisor, one of many duties performed by Scott Kostreba include reviewing Coast Guard security policies for compliance and providing advice on correctly adhering to these policies. USCG Auxiliary photo by Lisa Repetto.

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National Leadership

Scott's second role occurs at the national level. He recently accepted the role of Division Chief - Cybersecurity Prevention Operations for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Cybersecurity Directorate, previously serving as Branch Chief - Cybersecurity Field Operations. Scott oversees three branches: Cybersecurity Prevention Policy, Cybersecurity Exercise Support, and Cybersecurity Field Operations. Scott explains his main functions: "Provide leadership as part of the chain of leadership and help provide resources to the reporting branches, ensuring that they complete their assigned tasks."

In addition, Scott also "works on the onboarding and recruiting process, matching up Auxiliary Cybersecurity Advisor candidates and Coast Guard sectors (MTSS-C) throughout the Coast Guard." Cybersecurity positions require applicants to have a background in cybersecurity and a DOD cybersecurity certification. "Most cybersecurity advisors are referrals, and then they earn their stripes. Reputation is important for this activity area." Scott added.

The Future of AUXCYBER

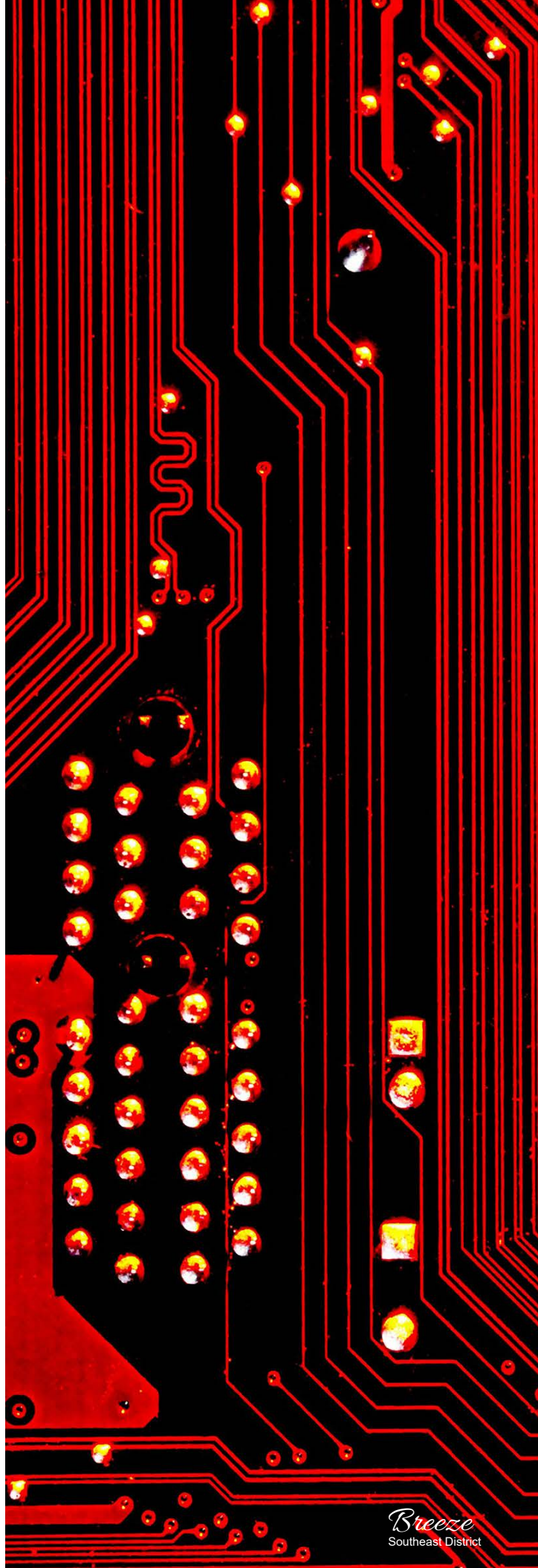
The Southeast District has the highest number of cybersecurity advisors, followed by the Northeast District. In conducting research for this article, I discovered the existence of a flotilla in the East District-South Region, established in April 2023 and based out of Fort Meade, Maryland—Flotilla 22-12. It is the only flotilla created primarily to "recruit and retain cybersecurity professionals to support the Coast Guard's missions in the cyber domain." The only activities its members perform are cybersecurity-related.

On the horizon, a cybersecurity Performance Qualification Standard (PQS) is in development, but no completion date has been announced. "We are hoping to place Auxiliary cyber advisors within every sector to assist the Coast Guard," Scott noted. Ω

Get Involved

If you have Cybersecurity experience and are interested in finding out more about the AUXCYBER program, contact Scott at scott.l.kostreba@cgauxnet.us.

AUXCYBER web page: <https://wow.uscgaux.info/content.php?unit=Y-DEPT>



Tips for “Acing” a Public Affairs Oral Board

By Mary Patton, DSO-PA



Mary Patton, DSO-PA

Many members who would like to obtain the Auxiliary Public Affairs Specialist 3 (AUXPA3) certification and the accompanying red-and-white-striped ribbon are put off when they read in the instructions that they must pass an oral board. Right away, memories of high school or college classes that required

standing in front of the class to give a presentation invade their thoughts. However, this assessment could not be further from the truth.

An oral board is a conversational interview focused on public affairs and the member’s ideas for effectively telling the Coast Guard Auxiliary story. It also involves answering questions from the Public Affairs Study Guide in your own words. That’s the key: you don’t have to memorize the answers word-for-word, just tell the Board what the question means to you.

Pro Tip #1: Enter all the questions from the Study Guide for the level you are pursuing into your computer, leaving space between each one so you can compose your answers. Print them out, then cut apart each question and answer and tape them to individual 4×6 index cards. Study the cards at your convenience. You should become familiar with your answers to each question so that when you sit for your oral board,

you will be familiar with the answers because you already know how to answer each question.

You may also be given a scenario and asked how you would respond based on the facts provided. This isn’t intended to trip you up, but rather to understand how you would handle the situation.

Pro Tip #2: Most likely, the oral board will be conducted via a virtual meeting platform such as Zoom or TEAMS. Whether in person or virtual, wear your Tropical Blue uniform and make sure all your insignia are correct and in the right place. It is important for staffing a public affairs event that all volunteer members be dressed in the same uniform and looking sharp. The public often perceives Auxiliary members as part of the active-duty Coast Guard, so we must present a sharp and professional appearance.

Pro Tip #3: Be prepared for your oral board. Study the questions and answers, wear your uniform smartly, and RELAX! Ω



“Attitude of Gratitude”

By Daniel Helou, DDC-P

As we close out 2025, it is my privilege to reflect on the exceptional achievements of our District Directorate for Prevention and the dedicated Auxiliarists who have made this year truly remarkable. Our commitment to the Coast Guard’s prevention mission has never been stronger, and the impact of our collective efforts resonates throughout our waterways and communities.

Special recognition and thanks to CMDR Stephanie Hodgdon, Prevention, USCG, Sector St. Petersburg; Commodore Martin Goodwin; and Chief of Staff, for their collective leadership and support.

Navigation Systems - John Frassanito

Our Navigation Systems team has demonstrated unwavering dedication to safe navigation throughout the district. Auxiliarists conducted comprehensive waterway patrols, maintained critical aids to navigation, and responded to numerous discrepancy reports with professionalism and efficiency. The team’s vigilance in monitoring navigation markers, especially during severe weather events, ensured that mariners had reliable guidance when they needed it most. The coordination with active-duty Coast Guard units has been seamless, reflecting the true spirit of the Auxiliary as the Coast Guard’s operational partner.

Marine Safety - William Saltenberger

The Marine Safety department has been instrumental in supporting our maritime inspection and compliance mission. Our qualified Auxiliarists worked alongside Coast Guard Marine Inspectors, contributing valuable hours to facility inspections, waterfront facility security assessments, and marine casualty investigations. Their technical expertise and attention to detail have enhanced the Coast Guard’s capacity to maintain the highest safety standards across commercial and recreational maritime operations. The relationships built with industry partners this year will serve as a foundation for continued collaboration.

Public Education - Sean Hunt

Public Education continues to be one of our most visible and impactful programs. This year,

our instructors reached thousands of boaters through Boat America, seamanship programs, and specialized seminars. The successful transition to hybrid learning formats has expanded our reach, allowing us to educate mariners who might not otherwise have access to quality instruction. Our team’s creativity in developing engaging presentations and their passion for sharing knowledge have undoubtedly prevented accidents and saved lives on the water.



Daniel Helou
District Directorate Chief for Prevention

Vessel Examinations - Patricia McGowan

The Vessel Examination program achieved outstanding results in 2025, with our certified vessel examiners conducting thousands of courtesy safety checks throughout the district. These one-on-one interactions with recreational boaters represent the heart of prevention, educating boat owners about safety equipment requirements and best practices before problems occur. The high number of vessels awarded the Vessel Safety Check decal is a testament to both the dedication of our examiners and the effectiveness of their educational approach. Every conversation, every inspection, contributes to a culture of safety on our waterways.

Program Visitors - Bryan Bowie

Our Program Visitors have been the vital link in maintaining program quality and member engagement across our facilities. Through their facility visits and mentorship, they have ensured program consistency, identified training needs, and recognized excellence throughout the district. Their constructive feedback and support have strengthened our programs at every level, and their role in

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fostering communication between facilities and district leadership cannot be overstated. The Program Visitor team exemplifies servant leadership at its finest.

Aux Scout - Daniel Muelhaupt

The partnership with Sea Scouts BSA has flourished this year, introducing young people to maritime skills, seamanship, and the values of service and leadership. Our Auxiliaries serving as liaisons have opened doors for youth to experience life on the water while learning navigation, boat handling, and environmental stewardship. These young mariners represent the future of our maritime community, and the time invested in their development pays dividends far beyond what can be measured in statistics.

Member Training - Karen Miller (District Captain, elect)

Member Training has been the engine driving excellence across all our programs. The training team developed and delivered comprehensive courses that kept our members current, qualified, and confident in their roles. From basic member training to advanced specialty courses, the curriculum has been responsive to member needs and Coast Guard requirements. The successful implementation of distance learning opportunities and hands-on workshops has ensured that every Auxiliarist, regardless of location, has access to quality professional development.

State Legislative Liaison Officer - Anda Ray

Our State Legislative Action representatives have been vigilant advocates for boating safety

legislation and effective liaisons with state agencies. Their monitoring of legislative initiatives, coordination with state boating law administrators, and efforts to promote consistent safety standards have advanced the prevention mission at the state level. The relationships the Auxiliary has cultivated with lawmakers and regulatory agencies position the Auxiliary as a trusted voice in maritime safety policy discussions.

Looking Forward

As we reflect on 2025, we recognize that these achievements represent more than numbers and programs; they represent lives protected, knowledge shared, and communities served. Every hour volunteered, every boat examined, every student taught, and every waterway monitored contributes to the Coast Guard's lifesaving mission.

The dedication, professionalism, and spirit of service displayed by the members of the District Directorate for Prevention embody the finest traditions of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. I am honored to serve alongside such an exceptional team and look forward to building on these successes in the year ahead.

Semper Paratus

Daniel Helou,
District Directorate Chief - Prevention
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary



VIEW FROM THE DECKPLATE

Division 2

LTJG Kyle Hector is joined by Rich Adams, Commander of Flotilla 29, Lake Lanier, for the commissioning of COASTIE 2.0 at the flotilla's change of watch ceremony. Erik Amato, Coastie's Engineer, is to their left, and Michael Goetschlis, outgoing Flotilla Commander, stands at the far right. USCG Auxiliary photographs.



COASTIE 2.0 was commissioned and is ready to teach children about boating and water safety. USCG Auxiliary photograph.

Note: UNDERWAY, the newsletter for Flotilla 29, Lake Lanier, December 2025 issue, is dedicated to their change of watch ceremony. These images are extracted from that issue.



Division 7



Flotilla 7-16, Gulfport, lost its radio room and antenna after last year's hurricanes. Like other flotillas impacted by the storm, they are improvising. The last radio guard at their facility was on Sept. 4, 2024, utilizing a tent pitched beside their facility.

Gulfport Radio now shares space with The Gulfport Marina, but what a space it is! Fridge, coffee maker, comfortable seats, big screen, and a table. There is still some arranging to do, but only after the city of Gulfport finishes its own remodel. Telecommunications operators Howard Bush and Kenneth Hoover conducted radio guards for Coast Guard C-27 training flights on Dec. 11, the first operational use at their new location. USCG Auxiliary photograph by Tom Steiger.

VIEW FROM THE DECKPLATE

Division 5

On July 21, members of Flotilla 56, Vero Beach/ Sebastian, conducted joint towing exercises with Flotilla 58, Fort Pierce, for a day of hands-on towing exercises. The training took place under sunny skies and sweltering summer heat—perfect conditions to test both seamanship and endurance.

Flotilla 56's crew for the day included Ray Newmura, coxswain; Mike Linden, boat crew; Dan Blankenship, and Mike McCormick, boat crew trainee.

The exercises focused on maneuvering techniques and various towing scenarios. Under the steady guidance of Coxswain Newmura, the team successfully practiced controlled approaches, line handling, and secure towing procedures. These drills help ensure that crews remain proficient in assisting distressed vessels, a vital mission of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

While the temperature soared, morale stayed high. The camaraderie between the two flotillas, combined with the satisfaction of honing critical skills, made for a productive and rewarding day on the water. USCG Auxiliary photos by Mike Linden.



Superbase A-building And ways for Auxiliarists to contribute abound.

By William Garvey, AUXPA3, Flotilla 12-6, East Cooper



Craig Rayner, Vice President of Whiting-Turner, left, George Rogers, President and CEO of RQ Construction, Capt. Neal Armstrong, Facilities Design and Construction Center commanding officer, Capt. Eric Jones, commander of Coast Guard Base Charleston, Mayor Reggie Burgess, City of North Charleston, Adm. Linda Fagan, then commandant of the Coast Guard, Master Chief Heath Jones, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, Rear Adm. Laura Dickey, Deputy for Materiel Readiness, Rear Adm. Carola List, commander of Operational Logistics Command, Rear Adm. Douglas Schofield, commander of Coast Guard Southeast District, break ground during a Coast Guard groundbreaking ceremony for a new Base Charleston campus in North Charleston, South Carolina, Jan. 26, 2024. The 64-acre campus along the Cooper River will support the five Charleston-based national security cutters, their crews, and the support personnel. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Moreno.)

Each wanted what the other had, and without which, neither could move forward with plans they regarded as critical to their respective futures. The division between the two was clear, mostly straight and even paved, and named Bainbridge Avenue.

Where? A main road on the former U.S. Navy shipyard in North Charleston, South Carolina, ran through land on the north side that belonged to the State Ports Authority (SPA). In contrast, the acreage on the south side was under the control of the U.S. Coast Guard/Department of Homeland Security. The SPA sought to create a rail yard for transferring large shipping containers between a

new maritime terminal and the rail line. As for the Coast Guard, it wanted to expand its facilities and homeport for the forthcoming Legend-class National Security Cutters (NSCs).

The problem? The new container ship terminal was to the south of Bainbridge and the Cooper River waterfront, and former USN piers were to the north.

But rather than scheme, threaten, cajole, or overwhelm with political and fiscal allies, the two

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sides met, talked, and ultimately agreed to exchange their respective landholdings. The results of that symbiotic super swap five years ago are looking to be spectacular.

The new \$400 million rail yard – a first for the Charleston port — is set to open next year and promises to facilitate freight movement throughout the southeast while easing the city's heavy road traffic.

As for the Coast Guard, it is constructing an all-new complex on a cleared 64-acre parcel abutting the Cooper River while simultaneously rebuilding the first of several former Navy piers. Once completed, those 1,190-foot-long concrete and steel quays could ultimately serve ten or more large cutters, with the first four NSCs already homeported in Charleston. The reconstructed Pier November (N) is slated to begin welcoming cutters by late 2026, with work on Pier Mike (M), which formerly serviced submarines, to follow. Reconstruction of the service's 1940s-vintage Pier Papa (P) is likely but not yet scheduled.

Meanwhile, construction of an all-new Base Consolidated administration building is well underway and set to accommodate staff and visitors by late 2026 as well. The 51,100-square-foot facility – to be named in honor of retired Gunner's Mate First Class Willis Goff, a Vietnam combat veteran, Silver Star recipient, and South Carolina native, will provide secure spaces for admin support, fisheries training, a CGX Mini Mart, and cutter support. And that's just for starters.

The next building phase will include a medical facility, dental clinic, an electrical substation, site and road work, plus access and control, and physical security. That work is expected to be contracted next spring. And there's yet more.

Planned are an Unaccompanied Personnel Housing facility, an accompanying galley and exercise space, an engineering complex for maintaining the assets on the waterfront, plus storage, shipping



U.S. Coast Guard Base Charleston, South Carolina, Piers Papa, November, and Mike (left to right) showing work in November 2025, well advanced. Drone photo by USCG Base Charleston.

and receiving facilities, and additional vehicle parking.

And once its rework is completed, Pier Mike (M) could become home to as many as five Offshore Patrol Cutters (OPC), with the first arriving about five years from now.

“Base Charleston has grown steadily since its establishment in 2015,” says Captain Eric Jones, the complex’s commanding officer. He explained that Charleston was designated a base because of the high concentration of Coast Guard personnel and resources in the region. The designation allows the service to consolidate and support Coast Guard operations and the increasing demand for services both locally and regionally. The decision was further supported by plans to homeport more major cutters and related operational logistics functions there in the future.

But what has evolved is something much broader. Base Charleston is now home to a variety of tenant commands including Sector Charleston, Station Charleston, the Maritime Law Enforcement Academy, the Southeast Regional Fisheries Training Center, the Office of Chief Prosecutor, Aids to

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Navigation Team (ANT) Charleston and NSCs *James, Hamilton, Stone, Kingfisher, and Calhoun*, as well as construction and buoy tenders *Anvil and Willow*, respectively. The base has two sites, one downtown on Charleston Harbor and another at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, which is adjacent to the third new campus now under construction.



The Base Consolidated Administration Facility, now under construction, is expected to welcome staff and visitors by the end of 2026. Artist's rendering by RQ-AECOM JV, a contractor.

The service currently has approximately 1,300 active duty and civilian personnel in the Charleston area. Still, that figure is expected to double over the next five to ten years as its staffing and count of homeported cutters grow.

Indeed, Charleston has been forecast to become an operational “center of gravity” for the service. Since it will be the only base able to support up to ten major cutters, it will be the Coast Guard’s largest homeport. And, according to CAPT Jones, those newcomers assigned to Charleston will be super pleased.

“The people here love it and love working here,” he says, adding “the support we receive from the Charleston area community is tremendous,” a fact underscored by Charleston’s tri-county recent designation as an official Coast Guard community. And Jones adds that the new facilities coming online will “make this locale even more desirable.”

As more active-duty members and their families move to Charleston, as the cutter count grows, and as commands there expand, Jones agrees that the opportunities for and the welcome of Auxiliary support increase as well.

Currently, Auxiliarists assist Charleston and Southeast District operations and personnel in numerous ways. These include service as om-

budsmen, culinary assistants, gangway officers of the watch, event ushers, contractor monitors, air crews on active Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT) searches and intercept exercises, boat crews ensuring vessel safety at public events, and more. And this is in addition to the regular on-water and air patrols, public safe boating education, vessel inspections, and program visitor roles with which the Auxiliary is so closely identified.

John Swink, Charleston-based commander of Auxiliary Southeast’s Division 12, says the evolution of the “superbase” is a special call to action and a chance for area Auxiliarists to apply their broad range of skills and knowledge, as well as their time, to helping the Gold Side accomplish its varied and critical missions.

“By Auxiliarists stepping in as relief,” Swink notes, “active-duty members can focus on their critical tasks and, hopefully, get home a bit earlier to spend more quality time with their families.”

And that’s a simple but sensible swap by every measure. Ω



Coast Guard Mutual Assistance is proud to serve the entire Coast Guard family, including Auxiliarists.

To donate go to: <https://mycgma.org/give-help/>

AX

How a Central Florida Flotilla and Clearwater Coast Guard Station Partnered with Pasco County Fire Rescue: Launching *Fire Marine 1*

By Lisa Repetto, Branch Assistant-Assistant Editor (BA-AMEA)

An Idea Becomes a Reality for the Special Operations Division of Pasco County Fire Rescue.



Capt. Bryan Spooner, Marine Support Officer with Pasco County Fire Rescue, on board *Fire Marine 1*, while Tom Mann, Flotilla Vice Commander, Flotilla 11-6, New Port Richey, stands on the docks positioned outside the New Port Richey flotilla. USCG Auxiliary photo by Lisa Repetto.

West Central Florida's Pasco County encompasses about 20 miles of coastline extending north from Aripeka to Tarpon Springs and west to Anclote Key. The waterways and inland Gulf waters are served by local agencies such as the Pasco County Sheriff's Office and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), as well as several Coast Guard stations located about an hour away—not ideal in the event of a medical emergency or search and rescue (SAR) mission.

The conception of *Fire Marine 1* dates back to 2018, when Pasco County Fire Rescue (PCFR) staff began discussing the prospect of acquiring a vessel to serve Pasco County. Capt. Bryan Spoon-

er, Marine Support Officer with PCFR, shares how he and four other PCFR staff members made up a specification committee: "Basically, our goal was to come up with a spec for a boat that met our needs here." The specification team visited other fire departments in Florida to examine various types of vessels. Bryan noted, "We decided that we wanted our boat designed to function mainly as a medical response-oriented (EMS and trauma) facility, since most of our calls are not fire-related."

With frequent party boat activity in the area, Bryan

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explained, “We needed a shallow-running vessel with a large passenger capacity. The vessel also needed a pump for the firefighting aspect, so a 500-gallon-per-minute water cannon was included in the specifications. It isn’t huge, but it’s enough.” In addition, a bow-door ramp was determined to be the best design for their missions. “The ramp can be lowered to the water surface to easily load victims into the boat and onto a dock.”

By 2019, the boat specifications were issued for bid, and the contract was awarded to MetalCraft Marine in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Bryan noted: “We were literally waiting on a purchase order (PO) to purchase the boat when COVID struck, causing a delay of several years and canceling the bid. The same bid was resent, and MetalCraft began construction of the vessel, which arrived in Pasco County in April 2025.”

An Auxiliary Flotilla Becomes Fire Marine 1’s Home Dock

Auxiliary Flotilla 11-6 is headquartered in the Gulf Harbors Community on the North Channel in New Port Richey. An Auxiliarist for nearly 14 years, Thomas “Tom” Mann, Flotilla 11-6 stalwart, has served as both flotilla commander and flotilla vice commander, in addition to holding numerous certifications: pollution response, port state control examiner and dispatcher, and boat crew member. Tom also earned the Marine Safety Trident device.

Tom, a Navy Vietnam veteran with a beaming smile, is an engaging storyteller and enthusiastically recounts his role in a mission he could never have imagined. He recalled, “My first conversation about the vessel was in November 2023 with Bob Lippman, who, at the time, was an Auxiliary member at Flotilla 11-7, Hudson. Bob said, ‘I might have an opportunity for you. I’ve had some conversations with Pasco County Fire Rescue, and they are looking for a base for their new fireboat.’”

Flotilla 11-6’s location provides quick access to the Gulf. Bob explained that PCFR had conducted an extensive area search for a centrally located base and identified

the flotilla building as a strong candidate. This conversation led to a meeting at Flotilla 11-6 headquarters, with Shawn Whited, Deputy Chief of Operations, PCFR, and other department representatives. Tom recalls, “They looked at our building, and, at that time, of course, we didn’t have a usable dock due to extensive damage as a result of a boating incident, which deemed it a safety hazard. PCFR staff measured everything and said, “Yes, this would work.”

PCFR staff explained that the boat was under construction and expected to be delivered in about a year (December 2024). This timeline allowed both parties to develop a working relationship, coordinate legal reviews, negotiate terms, and

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Capt. Bryan Spooner, Marine Support Officer with Pasco County Fire Rescue, on board Fire Marine 1. USCG Auxiliary photo by Lisa Repetto

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ultimately execute a three-year lease agreement, as well as plan for dock construction. According to Tom, "By June or July 2024, we had an agreement in place that both parties signed." *Fire Marine 1* arrived in April 2025.

The Coast Guard Comes to the Rescue with BOSAR Training

Fire Marine 1 required trained crew members, and firefighters from stations throughout Pasco and Hillsborough counties applied. Bryan explained, "As *Fire Marine 1*'s initial users, we had to train ourselves. This meant creating training task books using selected material from surrounding fire departments." The next goal was the completion of NASBLA's Boat Operator Search and Rescue (BOSAR) course.

Through coordination by Tom Mann, BM1 Jesse Gutierrez, Coast Guard Station Sand Key, agreed to assist and generously offered to conduct a BOSAR course for *Fire Marine 1* operators. The course was held in October at Flotilla 11-6 and included *Fire Marine 1* operators and two Pasco law-enforcement personnel.

Jesse explained that BOSAR is "almost identical to the Coast Guard type-specific model, meaning 'any task' for any platform, with tasks tailored to the vessel type."

- The deckhand portion consists of basic seamanship, while the operator portion includes boat handling, navigation, search patterns, and close-quarter maneuvering.
- A significant portion focuses on search and rescue, including drifting and precision search patterns. For real SAR incidents, Sector St. Petersburg (SSP) issues a Commence Search Point (CSP) and specific search pattern, and coordinates execution alongside Coast Guard vessels and aircraft.
- Training includes multiple evolutions and mock-drill scenarios, such as deploying an object in



Capt. Bryan Spooner, Marine Support Officer with Pasco County Fire Rescue, displays *Fire Marine 1*'s storage bin containing firefighting and emergency medical equipment on board *Fire Marine 1*. USCG Auxiliary photo by Lisa Repetto.

an unknown location and tracking its drift path.

- The course consisted of half classroom instruction and half on-water training.
- BOSAR certification allows the Coast Guard to use *Fire Marine 1* as a SAR asset.

Bryan called the training a success, noting, "He was great, and the class went very well. I'd like to have another class prior to spring so that all our operators are NASBLA-certified in BOSAR."

Fire Marine 1 Operations Overview

Fire Marine 1 is currently docked for the winter and returns to service in the spring. Bryan explains that the pause is due to budgeting, staffing, call volume, and the challenges of a new operation.

For the 2026 season, *Fire Marine 1* will be staffed with 10 operators and 18-20 deckhands, serving Pasco County waters out to approximately nine nautical miles while remaining within state waters. July through September's scallop season will be the busiest period, with *Fire Marine 1* operating

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seven days a week.

The vessel is equipped with forward-looking infrared (FLIR) and radar, enabling night operations. On a typical service day, the crew arrives at 11-6 by 8:00 a.m. for a briefing before getting underway. A minimum crew consists of one operator and two deckhands, one of whom must be a paramedic. All crew members are trained in Advanced Life Support (ALS).

At the end of a typical 12-hour shift—around 7:00 p.m.—*Fire Marine 1* returns to the dock for debriefing. The engines are flushed, the equipment is offloaded, and the vessel is secured. Pre-assigned crews remain available for after-hours responses if needed.

Fire Marine 1's Unexpected Debut and Official Dedication

Fire Marine 1 arrived at its new home in April 2025, with a public launch planned for July 29. The vessel unexpectedly made its operational debut on June 5, when a three-story canal-side home nearby caught fire. "We weren't even in service," Bryan recalled. "The crew was training when they heard the fire call and saw smoke." *Fire Marine 1* responded from the water, supplying pumped water while ground crews attacked the fire from the street.

Fire Marine 1 was officially dedicated on July 29, 2025, during a ceremony at Flotilla 11-6 attended by county commissioners, fire rescue personnel, partner agencies, residents, and local media outlets, including Bay News 9 and Fox 13 Tampa Bay. Tom Mann delivered remarks on behalf of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Thank you, Capt. Bryan Spooner, PCFR; BM1 Jesse Gutierrez, CG Station Sand

Key; and Thomas Mann, CG Auxiliary Flotilla 11-1, for exemplary teamwork and a partnership dedicated to saving lives. Ω

**Fire Marine 1, among others, falls under the Special Operations Division of Pasco County Fire Rescue*

Once underway, Sector St. Petersburg is notified by radio: "This is *Fire Marine 1*—we are available—allowing Sector to call them directly," Tom explained. *Fire Marine 1* also receives calls through the 911 dispatch center and VHF Channel 16.

Communications with partner agencies are essential. Tom observed, "*Fire Marine 1*'s crew continues to work on improved communications with the Coast Guard and other agencies so that everything is efficient and reliable." He added, "Coordination is an important part of operations. They are another partner in life-saving operations."



Tom Mann, Flotilla Vice Commander, Flotilla 11-6, New Port Richey, Capt. Bryan Spooner, Marine Support Officer with Pasco County Fire Rescue, and Lisa Repetto, pose in front of *Fire Marine 1*. USCG Auxiliary photo by Lisa Repetto.



*May Holiday Lights
brighten the Season
for you and yours...*

*Set your goals to have a prosperous
and productive year 2026.*