



REAPING THE REWARDS OF MEMBERSHIP



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When I purchased my new boat, I was amazed that the dealer was just going to give me the keys and congratulate me on my purchase! I had to somehow get the boat from the west side of the Bay to Barrington. I had never driven a boat in my life and here I was, given the keys to a high powered vessel! I would have been nuts to pick that boat up by myself.

I checked around for boating classes and took a boating safety class by the USCG Auxiliary. I had no idea what the Auxiliary was, but it was reassuring to take a course with folks that knew what they were talking about. Of course, the fact that the course had US Coast Guard in the title, gave me great confidence.

I took the course and learned a great deal. However, I still didn't feel comfortable picking up my new boat in the spring. Fortunately, Anne Hitchen, the then Flotilla Commander, found several Auxiliarists who were willing to go with me to pick up the boat on their own time. Ultimately, Tony Ruggiero, not only helped me pick up the boat, he also took me out several times to help me get acquainted with my new vessel. Ultimately, as a result of Tony's generous actions, I came to speak to him more about the Coast Guard Auxiliary. I quizzed him on the Auxiliary and learned why I would want to become a part of an organization known as America's Volunteer Lifesavers!

I've since come to learn that on an average day, somewhere in the United States, an Auxiliarist will help educate 929 people on issues surrounding Recreational Boating Safety & Marine Environmental Protection. Likewise, America's Volunteer Lifesavers will save \$729,000 worth of property while assisting 56 People in Trouble on Water. Another 615 Vessel Safety Checks will be performed as well as over 150 support missions for the United States Coast Guard. And most important of all, one or two recreational boaters, whose death was certain - somewhere on the waters of the U.S. - had his or her life saved by a Coast Guard Auxiliarist! And to top it all off, they, enjoyed what they were doing! They like volunteers all over the nation reaped the rewards that only come when you unselfishly give to others so they can better themselves.

I soon decided that I wanted to help give back to the Auxiliary for all that they did for me and soon got involved in my local Flotilla which encompasses the area around Somerset, Ma. At the first meeting I attended, I met a group of folks who were very passionate about boating and working with boaters. I learned that I could get involved in a number of areas in the Auxiliary. Over the first few months, I investigated what was available and soon started volunteering for various roles.

The Boat Crew program was of the greatest interest to me. I learned that with the proper training, I could become a member of boat crew that would patrol the waters in our area. We patrol local waterways, conduct bridge and marina inspections, train regularly for man overboard situations and conduct search and rescue drills and vessel towing. Even the dullest and most uneventful patrol in itself provides benefits to the boating public. We have a number of Auxiliary vessels that ply the waterways of Narragansett Bay on a regular basis. I have been out with some of the finest Coxswains in the Auxiliary, like Dave Morin, Tony Ruggiero and Jim Simek. I have learned something valuable from each of them and as my skills grow have had an opportunity to drive vessels that are larger than my boat and have gained much more confidence in my own boating skills. What better way to become a better boater!

Tony told me about the Vessel Safety Check program that sounded interesting to me. Upon completion of the training program, I spent training time with Tony conducting Vessel Safety Checks (VSC) on boats at our local marinas and boat ramps. We approach boaters and ask if they want a VSC. This starts the process of both educating the boaters, not only on what he or

she forgot to check, but also additional safety items and the need for further boater education to the mix.

Over the winter and spring months, our Flotilla conducts a number boating courses from Boating Skills and Safety classes, to basic and advanced navigation courses, to courses for our children. As a former teacher, armed with more knowledge as a result of the on the water and classroom instruction by the Coast Guard, I was comfortable getting involved in the instruction program. With the support of mentors such as Joe Silvia, our Flotilla Staff Officer for Public Education (FSO-PE), Alex Malgieri, our Flotilla Commander (FC), and my old pal Tony Ruggiero, I taught my first classes this year. It has been very rewarding to be involved in these courses. The more involved I get the more I learn from my mentors and from those that attend the classes. There is no better way to prepare for a safe boating season than a Coast Guard Auxiliary course.

Of course, you'll also find Auxiliarist at local boat shows, staffing the communication centers at some Coast Guard facilities, acting as tour guides at Boston Light, and supporting the Coast Guard in all areas except law enforcement and military functions. There is something for everyone in the USCG Auxiliary!

27,000 men and women spend hundreds of thousands of hours making boating and environment safer. Take the time and talk to a member of Team Coast Guard. There are lots of interesting aspects that make becoming a member of the team a unique experience. If you would like additional information on the US COAST GUARD or the USCG Auxiliary, please visit our local website at <http://a0130804.uscgaux.info>.

See you on the water.