

Coast Guard Auxiliary members volunteer many hours lake duty

By Ollie Moyer

Editor in Chief

Volunteer members of the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary have logged services on Lake Murray this past year which "no other flotilla in this country have attained, I don't care how big they are," Jay Dahlgren, vice commodore of the 7th district and a member of the Lake Murray group, told Flotilla 12-3 upon being informed that the Lake Murray group has participated in 191 search and rescue missions in 2001.

"There's one flotilla in this district with over 400 members that hasn't seen 191 SARs in 10 years," Dahlgren observed when operations officer George Crouch

cited 2001 year-to-date activity mission report totals.

In his words of praise to the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary members, Dahlgren cited all the totals in the activity mission report, which also included 994 man-hours volunteered by coxswains and 1500 man hours volunteered by crew members on patrol duty, along with 4349 hours of time donated by watch standers, and said, "That's something worth tooting your horn over. That's quite an accomplishment."

Operations officer Crouch, who released the activity mission report compiled by Don Davis, said every member of the

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Flotilla "deserves a pat on the back...whether you realize it or not, we have had 180 patrols on the lake, and the year is not over yet. This is one working flotilla, and all of you deserve a big hand. All of you have put in an awful lot of time over the summer. You've shown a lot of dedication. I believe out of our entire group, we've probably done as much as everybody else in the district."

In other remarks to the Flotilla, the 7th district commodore reported that his district, which includes South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, is the largest district in the United States with 5,700 members.

"This year, the 7th district has picked up 1,056 new members," said Dahlgren. "That's unbelievable."

He cautioned, however, that in some cases friends are recruited who, once they join, never come back to a meeting.

"It's not fair to us or to them to force them to join just so we can say we have the largest flotilla," said Dahlgren.

He said he is considering suggesting a moratorium "whereby we give prospective members 90 days to come to our meetings, attend our activities, and come out on boats with us, which is permissible as trainees or potential members, and let them make up their own mind if they really want to join and not join just because of pressure from friends. It's nice to have new members, and this way they'll still be around next year."

During his remarks to the Flotilla, Crouch also reflected on inactive members of the Lake Murray group.

"We have a lot of members on the roll and we want to think about getting some of them involved in participating in patrols next year," he said. "This crowd, the ones who are at our meetings, volunteer and I don't have any problems with you. But maybe we can just assign a weekend to some of the members who are not involved, if they're interested. We don't want to miss anybody who feels like they're left out."

If they're not getting involved because they don't want to, that's okay, but some people who might want to participate will sit back and wait until you ask them. We don't want to miss these people."

Crouch reviewed the success of a recent joint exercise between the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Civil Air Patrol, during which time the Auxiliary assisted the CAP with a simulated helicopter crash.

Just as the exercise was beginning, Crouch said the Auxiliary received a call from the Department of Natural Resources seeking assistance for a disabled boat in the vicinity of Macedonia Lutheran Church.

Crouch said he asked the CAP airplane, which already was circling overhead, to see if they could spot a boat that appeared disabled. They reported observing a pontoon that appeared to be towed.

Crouch said he then went up to that area to check to see if that was the boat DNR had called about, and said the boaters, from Gaffney, had said they had been stuck on the water for five hours.

"They didn't have a cell phone or a radio," said Crouch, who added that he recommended they get one or the other for Christmas.

"They were very appreciative that we checked on them," he said. "I explained to them about the aircraft overhead. One of them said he had observed a plane going around and around and had wondered what was going on."

Crouch said the joint exercise "is a wonderful tool, and I think we're going to try to do some more joint training. We had a lot of fun. They seemed anxious to work with us and do some more training. They're our equivalent to the Air Force. Their mission is search and rescue over land where ours is water."

Crouch added that he was very impressed with their cadet program and has wondered if this is something the Coast Guard Auxiliary should explore. "They had a lot of very active cadets that participated, and we were very impressed with them," he said. "We enjoyed working with them and it was a very enjoyable experience."