

Coast Guard Auxiliary strengthens communication on lake during 2001

By Ollie Moye

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Editor in Chief

The Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary continued in 2001 to strengthen its presence on Lake Murray, especially stepping up its commitment to becoming the top communications vehicle on the lake.

With budget cuts straining two key law enforcement agencies dedicated to safety on the lake - the Department of Natural Resources and the Lexington County Marine Patrol - the Coast Guard Auxiliary increased its volunteer manpower on the lake, especially during the long 10-day July Fourth holiday period which began June 29 and ended July 8.

A highlight of the year for several Auxiliary members occurred when Coast Guard Charleston extended a special in-

itation to Flotilla 12-3 members to board the famed buoy tender Madrona. Thirteen members responded. The visit became even more memorable because it occurred on Sept. 11, the day the terrorists attacked the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon, cutting short the planned work session aboard the Madrona.

The year began with the swearing in of staff officers by Commander William L. Turner. These include: C. Dale Owen, aids to navigation; Carl Brown, career counselor; Boykin Rosenborough, communications; Bobby Buscher, finance; Donald Davis, information services; E. Albert McCallister, materials; Jerry Ruschkofski, marine safety; James Smith, member training; Albert Morgan, marine visitor; George

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Marine VHF Radio Channels

Channel 16 - Calling and Distress Only

Channel 9 - Alternate Calling Channel for recreational boats

Switch to channels 68, 69, 71, 72 or 78 for conversation

Courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
Lake Murray Station

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Crouch, operations; Edward Jones, public affairs; Joe Richbourg, publications; E. Albert McCallister, public education; Michael Mikutaitis, personnel services; Jeanette Brown, secretary/records; James Fleming, vessel examination; and Joe Richbourg, immediate past commander.

In February, James A. Smith and friend Bobby Buscher, residents of Smallwood Drive on Lake Murray, were honored by District 12 of the Coast Guard Auxiliary for their outstanding activities and work as members of Flotilla 12-3. Both admit being surprised when they were recognized as recipients of the Auxiliarists of the Fourth Quarter of the year 2000.

In March, Jim Fleming announced dates of the vessel inspection program offered annually free to the boating public. The programs were held April 7 and 14 at Dreher Island State Park, May 12 at Lighthouse Marina and May 19 at Lake Murray Marina. And later, in celebration of National Vessel Safety Check Day, the Auxiliary held a special safety check at Lexington Personnel Watercraft near the Lowman Home in White Rock for the newly jet ski club.

The inspection program also was held at Lake Murray Marina as one of the numerous events of the second annual Boat Safety Day, sponsored by the Coast Guard Auxiliary with the help of several other key organizations on the lake. Operations officer George Crouch, who coordinated the Auxiliary's involvement, said the project is designed to focus attention on promoting safe boating on Lake Murray.

The location of Boat Safety Day was moved from the SCE&G park and boat ramp on the Irmo side of the dam, where

the first one was held a year earlier, to Lake Murray Marina to gain more room for displays. The six-hour program focusing on educating boaters how to protect their lives as well as the lives of their passengers and other boaters, began with a Blessing of the Fleet, conducted by a chaplain from the S. C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Budget crunches of state and local governments announced in the spring cut its way into Lake Murray through reduction in personnel at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the Lexington Sheriff's Office, which funds the Lake Murray Marine Patrol, but the Coast Guard Auxiliary rose to the occasion with an announcement that its volunteer members will step up this organization's patrol operations, more especially during the heavy traffic weekends of the summer, to help law enforcement promote safety on the lake.

George Summer, whose voice is recognized on Lake Murray over Channel 16s emergency station by hundreds of boaters, was awarded the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Achievement Award for meritorious and outstanding achievement in support of the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

In its preliminary preparations for heavy boating traffic on Memorial Day weekend in May, the Auxiliary announced a new VHF radio watch policy which solicits help from other vessels in times of emergency. Should help from the public be needed, the following marine assistance request broadcast will first be issued over Channel 16, recognized as the official emergency marine channel: "Hello all stations (three times), this is Coast Guard Auxiliary Lake Murray relaying a Marine Assistance Request broadcast. Listen on Channel 22A, out."

In mid-summer, the Coast Guard Auxiliary paid special attention to the extra long July Fourth holiday, which brought heavy traffic to Lake Murray during a 10-day period from June 29 through July 8. With budget cuts announced earlier in the year cutting into DNR and Lexington Marine Patrol manpower, Flotilla 12-3 Commander Bill Turner announced the Coast Guard Auxiliary was putting "everything on the water we can."

The attention the Coast Guard Auxiliary received during a busy summer of offering step-up search and rescue missions (the volunteer members assisted in searching for several drowning victims during the year) and especially weekend emergency radio service donated by its members, has become more noticed by the public, according to operations officer George Crouch, who assured Flotilla 12-3 members at their July meeting that "people who need help out on the lake are now calling for assistance from the Coast Guard Auxiliary because they know we're one of the few people who are listening to the marine radios on a regular basis."

Jean and David Crump, two participants at the fall boating safety class conducted by the Auxiliary, praised the course for "giving a lot of useful information" important to safer boating on Lake Murray. Flotilla 12-3 sponsors two classes each year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

The Flotilla not only concentrates on teaching others, but also of teaching its own members. In October, a dozen members of the unit, determined to add more polish to an already glittering radio communications system on Lake Murray, participated in a special three-hour radio communications class. The first-ever course was offered interested Auxiliary members who volunteer their time as radio watch standers, particularly on weekends.

In November, the Lake Murray Auxiliary accomplished what may be a Coast Guard Auxiliary record, especially in District 12, with the successful addition of nine new coxswains, all of whom completed their training in one class. Don Davis, who has administered coxswain training to more than 100 members of Lake Murray's Flotilla 12-3 during the past 18 years, said he had never heard of a class this large in the district.

In November also, Flotilla 12-3 was extended an invitation from Coast Guard Charleston to participate in the U.S. Coast Guard's Operations Patriot Readiness.

Several members of Flotilla 12-3 joined members of the South Carolina Civil Air Patrol, operating out of the Columbia Airport, for a combined joint exercise on Lake Murray in November. The exercise's scenario called for the CAP unit to locate a reported "downed" helicopter somewhere between Columbia and Greenville. The Auxiliary's role was to hide an emergency location beacon for the CAP to locate.

At the last meeting of the year, the Flotilla was informed that its members had participated in 191 search and rescue missions on Lake Murray in 2001. The activities report for 11 months also reflected 994 man-hours volunteered by coxswains, 1500 man hours volunteered by crew members on patrol duty and 3,349 hours of time donated by watch standers, all this causing Jay Dahlgren, vice commodore of the 7th district and a member of the Lake Murray Unit, to observe, "That's something worth tooting your horn over. That's quite an accomplishment."

The year ended with the installation of Kent McCoin as commander and George Crouch as vice commander at the auxiliary's annual Christmas Dinner, held in December at Flotilla Island on Lake Murray.