



Gene M. Seibert, National Commodore

SUBJECT:

Auxiliary Public Education

New Offerings in Public Education!

From the National Commodore

This edition of *On Course* begins a series of occasional articles written by the program experts – the National Staff who develop and oversee existing and emerging new programs.

As a lead into this particular article on public education and new members, I feel it prudent to give you some background information.

As we approach 2006, the Coast Guard Auxiliary will place an extensive focus on four important and specific areas. They are:

- Our ability to balance our missions against our resources
- To revitalize and re-emphasize the importance of RBS
- To concentrate on recruitment and retention
- To concentrate on our planning convergence with the Coast Guard

As in 2005, we will continue our commitment to the core values of the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Auxiliary and reemphasize our commitment to Recreational Boating Safety, a key component of prevention strategies.

Some may ask why we need to place so much effort on Recreational Boating Safety since the Coast Guard continues to ask us to do enhanced missions that are operational in nature.

Since the enacting of the 1996 Auxiliary Act, which gave the Commandant the authority to expand our missions well beyond that of public education, vessel safety checks and safety patrols, the Auxiliary has also experienced a cultural transformation and that has been accelerated by the events of 9-11 and the recent hurricanes.

These intense events demanded a greatly enhanced operational focus in the Coast Guard and this operational focus has permeated into the Coast Guard Auxiliary. These events necessitated additional mission creep which in turn, created an even greater imbalance between the Operational and Recreational Boating Safety missions.

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD AUXILIARY COMMODORE'S INFORMATION

Over the past 10 years, our Operational mission involvement and productivity levels have been quite a roller coaster ride. During surge periods we are on a high level of Operational activity with many of our members scrambling toward the apex of the curve and enjoying the ride, fueled by the emergency and the 'glamour' of direct involvement with the active duty missions. When the surge is over, we rapidly head back down to a level of lower sustainable support where we wait for the next surge to occur. Our sustainable service level usually occurs over a longer period of time than the surge period. During the sustainable periods we are reminded of the reality of towing policies, fuel shortages and less glamorous missions. Coast Guard priorities often constrain our desire for greater involvement during the sustained level periods.

On the Recreational Boating Safety side, the roller coaster runs in the opposite direction. During sustained service levels, our dual-tasked members are regrouping and recharging their batteries so RBS activities continue to run on the low side. During operational surge times, RBS activities run even lower. During these operational surge periods, often spawned by disaster, many members use their limited energies to fulfill Coast Guard support needs, taking that available time and energy away from Recreational Boating Safety resources.

There is no question that Operations and direct Coast Guard support are very important and are part of what makes the Coast Guard Auxiliary unique. But these are only one part of our mission.

Some say that participation in Recreational Boating Safety does not make us unique. They argue that there are too many other entities in this arena such as the Power Squadron, the states, private industry and the Internet, all competing with us for public education and vessel safety checks. They ask "Why should we compete in those arenas?"

The quick answer is usually "Because of the money that public education brings in to the Auxiliary." Although that's very important, it's not the whole answer. Recreational Boating Safety missions are critical to the Auxiliary because they sustain our presence in the boating community. Auxiliary Recreational Boating Safety programs support the Coast Guard's mandated National Recreational Boating Safety Program Mission, which is: *To minimize the loss of life, personal injury, property damage, and environmental impact associated with the use of recreational boats, through preventive means, in order to maximize the safe use and enjoyment of US waterways by the public.*

If we promote membership in the Coast Guard Auxiliary primarily featuring our operational involvement with the Coast Guard, we will severely limit our potential numbers and the breadth of membership. If however, we are viewed by the public, and by potential and existing members, as an organization that promotes both safety and security, and if we consciously work to balance those missions, then we will attract and retain a wider diversity of skilled members.

One of the most important elements of Recreational Boating Safety is Public Education. Public Education has long been the primary way by which the Auxiliary teaches safe boating. Below is an exciting new approach that is in development at the Coast Guard Auxiliary's National Education Department. This new approach will not only add new courses to our programs, it is also an effective way of securing new members

Gene M. Seibert

Public Education and New Members

By Richard A. Clinchy, DC-E

Department Chief, Education

For as long as our Auxiliary history documents, we have advocated Recreational Boating Safety Public Education as the primary means of attracting new members.

The National Auxiliary Education Department is developing a series of programs that will enhance the ability to recruit new members through public education and perhaps more significantly, recruit new members *with boats*.

At N-Train 2005, your District Staff Officers – Public Education, introduced the idea of offering serialized boating education courses for the recreational boater.

At present, we have a series of education programs under modification or development. These are:

- An introduction to piloting short course based upon Boating Skills & Seamanship or Sailing Skills & Seamanship (Being released Q3 2006) Lesson 9
- How to Read a Nautical Chart
- GPS for Mariners
- Radar for Mariners (If we adopt this course)
- Weekend Navigator

It will take the Auxiliary Education Department and other participants many more months to finalize all of the details of this new series but a PE Speedgram is scheduled for June 2006 that will explain the programs in detail. These programs will be formally rolled-out at NACON 2006 in Texas.

Let's take a look at how this series of courses might help your flotilla find new members and members with boats. Readers will quickly see that using these methods your flotilla will get several opportunities to recruit new members as your students participate in these classes:

Introduction to Piloting – This will be your first opportunity to educate recreational boaters about what they might learn if they were to join the Auxiliary and pursue our Boat Crew program. We can demonstrate our advanced knowledge and show them how that will enhance their boating skills. And if they join the Auxiliary, this course, taught to them by very experienced Auxiliarists, would cost them nothing! This idea should be attractive to most student boaters. According to our surveys, the principal reason that members joined the Auxiliary was to become better boaters.

How to Read a Nautical Chart – Aside from the academic aspects of charts taught in this course, flotillas could further enhance their relevance by supplementing the text material with their local charts. Further, flotillas' could introduce their own Auxiliary "area of responsibility familiarization list." This way, flotillas can demonstrate to students how, if they join the Auxiliary, this additional value is routine and would enable them to take their boating skills to an even higher level of comfort.

Taking this idea one step further, you can apply this to the On-The-Water Training Program. The OWT does not require participants to do everything exactly as listed in the program manual. For example, you might call your OWT an "area familiarization cruise." Obtain permission from your order-issuing authority and take your students aboard an OPFAC, enhancing your "How to Read a Nautical Chart program" by conducting an actual area familiarization on the water!

This would give the students one more opportunity to experience how their competence and confidence would be increased if they were a member of your flotilla. Such an activity would present a great opportunity to combine a Fourth Cornerstone activity with a public education class by letting the students meet your flotilla members.

GPS for Mariners – More and more recreational boaters are using electronic navigation and here is yet another opportunity to let our Auxiliary expertise shine. Many boaters buy a GPS unit but very few really understand the capability of the device. YOU will teach them and by doing so reinforce how much they might improve their boating skills in the Auxiliary. But let's suppose the student doesn't own a GPS yet. What a great opportunity this would present to point out another benefit of Auxiliary membership. Through our virtual mall at www.shopauxiliary.com, Auxiliary members can purchase GPS units from an online vendor that gives an added discount to Auxiliarists. Now, not only will they have learned how to use a GPS, but their purchase discount might just offset their first year dues if they decide to join.

Radar for Mariners – While we haven't decided whether or not to launch this new course program, the betting is that it will be approved at N-Train 2006. If we do go forward with this course, imagine how impressed a student might be to learn the skill of properly utilizing radar on their boat. Few recreational boaters really understand all of the benefits of GPS and you can multiply the mystery-factor when a boater installs radar. Like the GPS units, Auxiliary members can purchase radar at an additional discount through the Auxiliary Virtual Mall.

Weekend Navigator – This course will be the capstone of the new navigation series and will be introduced in the third quarter of 2006. It will replace our current BCN/ACN offering to the public. By the time your students complete this course, they will very likely be in absolute awe of the capabilities and knowledge displayed by the members of your flotilla. If they haven't already joined the Auxiliary, you can make one more appeal during this course.

Aside from the wealth of knowledge that your navigation series students will gain, this plan also incorporates awarding them a special recognition certificate, a special decal and a special pin for completing the course. Perhaps we will even provide a special ball cap that they can wear underway, attesting to their achievements.

Now, at the beginning of all of this, I mentioned these courses would bring members on board who owned boats. Think about it. Doesn't it stand to reason that many boat owners would be attracted to a series such as this?

As you see this program rolled out during 2006, take a serious look at incorporating these ideas into your flotilla's public education schedule. Both your instructors and your regular members will discover that being involved in this offering of public education courses will be fun. Equally important, done right you'll get new members for your flotilla. New members with boats!