

The Little Acorn That Became A Mighty Oak: The NSBW Story

By Harriet Howard, DVC-AS

This is the story about how National Safe Boating Week grew from an idea for vessel examinations to a full-blown celebration of boating safety.

The date is 1949. The place is Merrimac, Massachusetts. Steven Sadowski, Coast Guard Auxiliary Commander and Vessel Examiner of the Merrimac River Flotilla, had an idea: Hold a safe boating week event to stimulate courtesy vessel examinations. His idea began to take root. In June 1949, Sadowski and the members of his flotilla sponsored the first "Auxiliary Day" to perform courtesy vessel examinations. Pursuing his dream, Sadowski urged the selectmen of the town of Amesbury, to proclaim June 23, 1949, as "Coast Guard Auxiliary Day." In their proclamation, the selectmen pointed out that "the Auxiliary is now carrying out a noteworthy peacetime program of promoting safety at sea through courtesy examinations of pleasure craft."

During the next two years, Sadowski, now Division III Captain, continued to promote CMEs with the help of the flotillas in his division. In January, 1952, Sadowski, now District 1 (1NR) Vessel Inspection Officer, proposed having a Courtesy Examination Weekend, designating the week of June 28 as "Safe Boating Week."

Sadowski knew the value of publicity and asked the division captains to contact the governors of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island to proclaim the week beginning June 28 as "Safe Boating Week." He also saw the advantage of using radio and the press. In 1955, press releases publicizing CMEs were issued by the governors

At the Auxiliary's National Conference in San Francisco in 1956, Harold B. Roberts, Chief Director of Auxiliary, stated, "We should consider the importance of having a National Safe Boating Week each year throughout our country." Sadowski's idea was catching fire.

On June 4, 1958, the U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution, sponsored by Senator Chamberlain of Michigan, to "proclaim annually, the week which includes July 4th as "National Safe Boating Week" (NSBW). It became Public Law 85-455. President Dwight Eisenhower was the first president to proclaim it.

Today, National Safe Boating Week is held the full week before Memorial Day. In 2006 it is May 20 to 26. "The Week" is celebrated, not only with vessel safety checks (formerly CMEs), but public affairs booths, safe boating activities and plenty of media coverage.

The little acorn planted by Steven Sadowski grew into a great oak spreading over the 50 states and territories.