



Press Release

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FAMILY USING LIFE JACKETS IMPROPERLY, SAVED BY VOLUNTEER LIFESAVERS

Training pays off as Coast Guard Auxiliary rescues panic stricken family after PWC capsizes

NORTHRIDGE, CA – As the annual National Safe Boating Week (NSBW) slated to begin this weekend, Joanne Thomas, a volunteer member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, was thinking about this year's NSBW theme, which encourages boaters to "Be a Survivor!" by wearing their life jackets.

Thomas, reflecting on her role in helping save the lives of three boaters two weeks ago, said the wearing of life jackets is only half of the equation. Her experience in the recent rescue reminded her that the other half of the life-saving formula is making sure that the life jacket is the proper size and it is properly fastened.

On May 6, 2007, three members of a Los Angeles area family looking for fun on nearby Pyramid Lake, climbed aboard a Personal Watercraft (PWC) after putting on life jackets. The PWC was designed for two people. "It was obviously overloaded. The water level covered their ankles," Thomas recalled.

Recognizing the family's situation as unsafe, Thomas along with three other seasoned U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary members and three trainees, kept an eye on the family from a short distance away.

Earlier in the day, Auxiliary member Robert Uy, led a variety of "man overboard" training drills for the newer members. Seeing the family pass the patrol boat, he pointed them out as an example of why the volunteers continue teaching boating safety education courses and spend thousands of hours conducting search and rescue safety patrols, yearly.

Fifteen minutes later, the Auxiliary boat crew was busy using their "man overboard" training, rescuing the panicked and physically challenged family, after the PWC capsized. "The father was fatigued, out of breath, and had pain from leg cramps, as he and the mother tried to rescue the panic-stricken child, who was swallowing water" Thomas explained.

Each year, nearly 700 people die in boating accidents. Nearly 90% of the fatalities do not wear a life jacket. This year's NSBW theme builds upon last year's theme – "Wear It." Together, the two themes combined can be expressed as, "Be a Survivor! - Wear It!"

The unfortunate family was lucky that the Auxiliary crew saw the potential for an emergency to develop and was nearby when they needed rescue. In addition to overloading the PWC, two of the family members had the

incorrect life jacket size on. The father wore a child's size and the child wore an adult size and failed to fasten all of its straps, according to Auxiliary member Tom Pelosi, who spotted the family in the water.

Erika Clemons, Coordinator of this year's NSBW campaign for the National Safe Boating Council, cautions boaters donning life jackets to "Put it on properly before you are in the water. There's no reason not to wear it! Much like a helmet to a biker or skate boarder, life jackets are an essential part of boating safety and should be worn at all times when on the water."

Thomas and her fellow Auxiliary boat crew members will not soon forget the day's lesson – in order to "Be a Survivor!," boaters have to "Wear It", properly!

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National Safe Boating Week is May 19th-25th. Join the Coast Guard Auxiliary in keeping America's waterways safe by ensuring your vessel is compliant with all safety standards.

And remember - to be a survivor - *WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET!!!*

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is composed of uniformed volunteers who assist the Coast Guard in all of its varied missions, except for military and direct law enforcement. These men and women can be found performing a variety of missions - on the nation's waterways, in the air, in classrooms and on the dock, performing Maritime Domain Awareness patrols, safety patrols, vessel safety checks and public education.

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary was founded in 1939 by an Act of Congress as the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and re-designated as the Auxiliary in 1941. Over 27,000 members donate millions of hours annually in support of Coast Guard missions.

For more information on the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, visit us at www.cgaux.org or www.axupa.org