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News Release

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Ahoy Mate: Boating Safety Education Turns 60

U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary launched its first program in 1948

LOS ANGELES - January 1, 2008 marks the 60th Anniversary of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary's public education program, which has undoubtedly played a role in saving thousands of lives. Educating the boating public on recreational boating safety as a means of "preventative search and rescue" has been one of the Auxiliary's cornerstone missions since its inception almost seventy years ago.

In 1939, Congress created the Auxiliary as the civilian, nonmilitary component of the U.S. Coast Guard. Penned "America's Volunteer Lifesavers," the nearly 30,000 men and women member teach boating safety in classrooms across the United States; they also perform search and rescue, assist boaters in distress, conduct safety examinations of recreational vessels, and assist the active duty Coast Guard in virtually all their missions, except direct law enforcement and military actions.

Although the missions of the Auxiliary have broadened over the years, teaching boating safety has always been one of its strengths. "Think of our boating safety courses as driver education classes for the water," said Ed Sweeney, Chief of the Auxiliary's Department of Public Affairs. "The goal of our classes is to prevent tragedy through education." Statistics support the fact that education saves lives, in that the overwhelming majority of those killed each year in boating accidents never had any form of boating safety education.

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is one of the largest volunteer boating safety organization in the world. Each year, Auxiliarists donate their time to teach boating courses, which are now estimated to reach nearly 100,000 boaters annually. It has been conservatively estimated that over 2 million Americans have take some form of boating safety education from the Auxiliary.

From the invention of the outboard engine and the motorboat, the construction of dams, reservoirs, and lake systems, to the rise in the sport of boating in 1950s-60s, the Auxiliary became an integral part of that growth in boating. When the Coast Guard received some 14,000 calls for assistance and handled 8,600 "in peril" cases, boating safety became a big issue. Recreational boaters needed to be better trained in seamanship and Federal law. The Coast Guard Auxiliary became the answer.

In January 1948, the Auxiliary's public education program was launched when it offered free public instruction at the National Motorboat Show held in New York City's Grand Central Palace. Boaters responded with enthusiasm.

In January 1950 the Auxiliary initiated an 8-lesson "Basic Seamanship" course. By the mid-1950s more than thirty-thousand men and women had taken an Auxiliary boating course.

In 1972, a new "Boating Safety and Seamanship" course was expanded to 12-lessons. Within four weeks of its release, 20,000 copies of the new materials had been requested, along with 4,000 copies of a new 7-lesson sail course. A thriving youth education program began in 1973 with the development of the "Water 'n Kids" course.

Over the years, Auxiliary instructors have also trained many law enforcement officials, game wardens, members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Boy and Girl Scouts, ROTC cadets, school children, and many more.

"Taking a boating safety course, along with wearing your life jacket, are two of the best things you can do to ensure your safety out of the water," said Sweeney. "Knowledge is power - and an effective means of preventing tragedy."

Today, the Auxiliary continues to train tens of thousands of boaters yearly in the basics of seamanship - piloting, rules of the road, aids to navigation, and weather, among other topics. But the courses have continued to evolve with the times. Now, the core curricula include instruction in maritime homeland security/maritime domain awareness, the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning, and dangers of cold water immersion.

The main core of boating and safety courses include is the advanced-level powerboat course, "Boating Skills and Seamanship" and "Sailing Skills & Seamanship," a short course called, "About Boating Safely," and a "Boating Fun" youth course. Many of the Auxiliary safety courses are approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and the U.S. Coast Guard. Also, insurance companies recognize the value of boating safety education, and many provide lifetime discounts for passing a NASBLA-approved boating course.

For more information about the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary classes, or to locate or enroll in a course, visit http://nws.cgaux.org/visitors/pe_visitor/index.html. To request a Vessel Safety Check visit www.cgaux.org. More on the history of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary can be found at www.history.auxpa.org.

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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 30,000 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.auxpa.org .