



# “Always Ready”

## Division 26 — Western North Carolina District Fifth Southern Region

Lakes Badin, Hickory, Norman, and Wylie

March 2024

### Division 26 Holds Change of Watch



CDR Otani administers the oath of office to Z. Nazif, DCDR (left), and D. Ray, VCDR.

Photo by H. Briggs

On 27 January 2024, Division 26 conducted its 2024 Change of Watch (COW) and 2023 Awards Ceremony at a country club in Huntersville. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to network and plan for the upcoming year.

Ziad Nazif was sworn in as Division Commander and David Ray as Vice Division Commander. Special guests included CDR David Otoni, Director of Auxiliary (DIRAUX) for D5SR; CDR Corrie Sargent, Deputy Commander, Sector North Carolina; and CDR Kevin Nash, Naval Junior ROTC instructor at Newton Conover High School.

CDR Otoni began his remarks by quoting Martin Luther King, Jr. who stated “Make a career of humanity” at the March for Integrated Schools in April 18, 1959. CDR Otoni stated that this is the same mission as those serving in the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

He noted that spending time in the Auxiliary is a choice and he thanked those present for making the choice to serve. CDR Otoni shared that COMO Krogmann wanted our Division members to be acknowledged for being one of five divisions in the district reporting a positive gain in membership.

CDR Sargent informed the group that the Auxiliary’s presence is felt and is vital on inland waters. The Coast Guard needs the Auxiliary now more than ever because of the crisis in Coast Guard retention and recruitment. CDR Sargent also stated that she was impressed with the professionalism of Auxiliarists.



CDR Corrie Sargent delivers remarks. Photo by H. Briggs



Honored guests (from left): CDR Otoni, D. Ray, VCDR; M. Wilson, IPDCDR; CDR Sargent; CDR Nash; Z. Nazif, DCDR Photo by H. Briggs

# Division 26 Welcomes 2023 Staff Members



On behalf of CDR Otoni, Z. Nazif presents Mark Briggs with an Auxiliary Commandant's Letter of Commendation for his outstanding performance of duty while serving concurrently as SO-VE, VFC of Flotilla 26-02, and FSO-MT. Through Mark's leadership 634 VSEs were completed by Division 26. Mark also earned his Boat Crew and PA Specialist 3 qualifications and the Recreational Boating Safety Device during 2023. Photo by H. Briggs

## Division Staff Officers for 2024

Auxiliary Scout	Norman Shepherd
Communications	Jim Loftin
Culinary Assistance	Mark Born
Diversity	Lundon Livingston
Finance	Stephen Whittaker
Human Resources	Don Murray
Information Systems	Christopher Craig
Materials	Michael Silva
Marine Safety	James Monroe III
Member Training	Scott Wigginton
Navigation Systems	Gary Eifried
Operations	James Loftin
Public Affairs	Stephen McCann
Public Education	Dan Stroup
Publications	Sharon Eifried
Program Visitor	Mark Onoszko
Secretary/Records	Norman Shepherd
Vessel Examination	Mark Briggs

## 2023 AWARDS PRESENTED

- ◆ Mark Wilson received an award for his service as Division 26 Commander in 2023.
- ◆ Rick Croasdale received his red suspenders for his service as Past Commander of Division 26.
- ◆ Mark Briggs was honored as Auxiliarist of the Year
- ◆ Mark Briggs received an Auxiliary Commandant's Letter of Commendation.
- ◆ Ziad Nazif received his Fifth Coast Guard Sustained Auxiliary Service Award.
- ◆ Awards for years in the Auxiliary:
  - Darrin Sanchez for 20 years
  - Jim Loftin for 25 years
  - Larry Mallonee for 30 years
- ◆ Awards for most hours in 2023:
  - Program Visits: Mark Valdez
  - Watch Standing: Sharon Eifried
  - Vessel Safety Checks: Tom Earnhardt
  - Public Education: Mark Wilson
- ◆ Flotilla 26-02 Lake Wylie received the Flotilla of the Year Award



Z. Nazif (on right) newly elected DCDR thanks Mark Wilson for his service as Commander of Division 26 during 2023. Photo by H. Briggs

# Ziad Nazif Assumes Command of Division 26

Submitted by Ziad Nazif, DCDR



After serving as Commander of Flotilla 26-01 for two years, and as Vice Commander of Division 26 for one year, Ziad Nazif assumes command of Division 26. As Z steps into his new leadership role, he shares the following message with his shipmates.

“A leader is only as good as the people who support him or her. An effective leader manages to encourage those who work under his or her leadership to do their best without micromanaging things.

I believe that our Division does well with both of those standards. We have staff officers who spend time beyond their home flotilla duties to assist division staff officers. Staff officers manage their responsibilities well and report up the chain as required in their respective areas. The

VCDR manages Division Staff Officers, stays vigilant, and advises the DCDR. The VCDR speaks out when something is amiss, for example when a necessary memo is not sent, the USCGAUX manual is not followed to the letter, or paperwork needs to be sent up the Chain of Leadership (COLM).

For those of you in leadership positions where your staff is thin, you understand the need to fill those slots with members who are not just present, but are also effective. Because of this, one of my goals for the year is to support our flotillas that need to bolster their membership and to assist them in getting out and being in the public eye. This may be through public affairs events, vessel safety checks, or boating safety classes. Use instructors from other flotillas if necessary. I want flotilla members to not only look at how they can assist their home flotillas, but also how they can assist other flotillas or members in our division who are struggling. Look for opportunities to help.

Our other goals for the year include...

- Completion of setting up the communications antenna and radio station at Blythe Landing.
- Setting up monthly safe boating and other USCG approved classes at the Blythe Landing Facility.
- Bringing in some major emergency services players to work with us. Continuing our relationship with Cornelius Lake Patrol.
- Offering more opportunities for members to qualify under the Incident Command System (ICS) for staff positions that may be needed in the event of a disaster within our division, sector or district.
- Increasing our membership, especially with persons under age 30.

There are also a few minor goals, and some goals that have taken years to progress, but still require additional time. Remember, every hour you spend (and hopefully log) while working within the scope of our mission, means that the boating public in Western North Carolina IS safer. We make a real difference. Because remember... we ARE the United States Coast Guard!

# Lake Wylie Flotilla Welcomes New Flotilla Commander

Submitted by Mark Briggs, FC



I am Mark Briggs, newly elected Flotilla Commander for Flotilla 26-02. My goal for 2024 is to continue the work of my predecessor in building our flotilla into a professional, competent, and willing-to-serve team. Through our initiatives, we can work to provide superior community service, continue to foster boating safety, thereby reduce boating injuries and fatalities. As one measure to that end, we will continue the on-going process of rebuilding our underway teams by cultivating an increase in our qualified coxswains and crew. Moreover, I want members of our flotilla to be seen as sharp and relevant ambassadors for the U.S. Coast Guard on Lake Wylie.

I bring the following experiences to my leadership position. I was born in Mississippi, and my family hails from throughout the South, finally settling in Charlotte, North Carolina. I spent most of my childhood in New Jersey and my teen and young adult years in

California. I obtained a Bachelors' Degree from Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California. I enjoy traveling, adventure, and exploring history. I have driven across the country ten times and have seen all 50 states. I have also seen one-third of Europe, Canada, and Mexico. Currently or in the past, I have participated in target shooting, archery, hiking, fishing, "disk" golf, cycling, photography, & calligraphy art.

I am a retired USCG Lieutenant and a former Boatswain Mate (23 years). I served on active duty for 14 years, and as a Reservist. My unit assignments included: USCGC Jarvis/Rush (1989-1991); Boathouse (Station) Honolulu, Hawaii (1990); Group (Station) Monterey, California (1991-1993); Station Georgetown, South Carolina (1998-2004), MOL Charleston/Savannah (2003-2004), OCS [ROCI] (2004), Group/Sector Charleston, South Carolina (2004-2009); District 5 Command Center (2009-2012); Sector North Carolina (2012-2015); and Sector Ohio Valley, Kentucky (2015-2017). The special events or missions that I participated in include: "Thunder Over Louisville" Air Shows, Louisville Kentucky (2016/17); Hurricane/Tropical Storms Author, Irene, Ike, Gustav, and Hanna (2008-2015); Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill, Grand Isle, Louisiana (2010); "9-11" active-duty mobilization (2001 & 2003); human trafficking interdictions, San Diego and Moss Landing, California (1993); America's Cup Race, San Diego California (1992); Hydrofest Boat Race, Honolulu Hawaii (1990); and Alaskan Enforcement Patrols (1989/1990).

I joined the USCG Auxiliary in June 2021 and have served as FSO-VE, FSO-MT, SO-VE and Vice Flotilla Commander. I am currently qualified as Boat Crew, Vessel Examiner, Program Visitor, and Public Affairs 3 (PA3).

My significant civilian occupations include the following: Reborn Computer Ministry/Charity (2020-present), Habitat for Humanity Union County North Carolina, (2016-2020), Electronic Data Systems [EDS] North Carolina/South Carolina (1997-2008), Campus Crusade/CoMission Riga Latvia (1996), L.A.B. INC computer data services North Carolina (1994-1995), and Community Relations Intern, Santa Barbara Police Department California (1987-1988).

# Lake Wylie Conducts Change of Watch 11 December 2023 in Tega Cay, South Carolina Submitted by Mark Briggs, FC



Mark Wilson, DCDR, administers the oath of office to Mark Briggs, FC and Jim Nass, VFC. Photo by L. Briggs

Flotilla 26-02 at Lake Wylie held their annual Change of Watch Ceremony on 11 December, 2023. Twenty-seven members and their guests were in attendance. The evening was marked by an excellent dinner, a meaningful ceremony, presentation of awards, and the ever-popular door prizes. In 2024, David Ray will be stepping down as Flotilla Commander and moving on to assume the position of Vice Division Commander. Mark Briggs will assume the helm with Jim Nass as Vice Flotilla Commander.

The evening was topped off by acknowledging certain members with noteworthy awards. Steve Whittaker received an Achievement Medal for his longstanding dedicated service as FSO-FN, FSO-IS, and FSO-SR. Jim Nass was named Flotilla 26-02 Auxiliarist of the Year for his significant contribution to Recreational Boating Safety this year. Lastly, Beverly Butlin received special recognition for achieving rapid qualification, for her enthusiastic high participation and significant contribution to Flotilla 26-02 even though she has only been a member for about six months.



Mark Briggs, FC, swears in 2024 Flotilla Staff Officers. Photo by L. Briggs



David Ray, outgoing Flotilla Commander, with Mark Briggs, incoming Flotilla Commander, with the traditional ship's wheel.

Photo by L. Hoover



Steve Whittaker receives Achievement Medal from Mark Wilson, IPDCDR. Photo by M. Briggs

# Reflections of a Leader

Submitted by Darin Sanchez, FC, Davidson Flotilla



My name is Darrin Sanchez and I am the Flotilla Commander for the Davidson Flotilla (054-26-03). In 2002, the horrific events of 9-11 led me to seek volunteer opportunities. I began my Auxiliary career on April 1, 2002 in New York with the Northport Flotilla (014-22-02). I became Boat Crew certified on June 20, 2002 and a Marine Dealer Visitor on October 8, 2002. On June 17, 2003 I received my certification as a Vessel Examiner. In 2004, my first appointed position was as Division 22 Staff Officer for Computer Services.

In February of 2005, I moved to Matthews, North Carolina and transferred to Flotilla 17-05, Lake Wylie. During my tenure with 17-05, I added my instructor certification and fingerprint technician skill while maintaining my other certifications. I was also Flotilla Commander from 2006-2008. In the Fall of 2008, I ran and was elected Division Vice Commander of the newly formed Division 26 and held that position for 2009.

In May of 2010, I transferred to my current Flotilla, 26-03, and have remained there ever since. This is my second tour as Flotilla Commander for the Davidson Flotilla. I was commander during the challenging times of the pandemic from 2020 – 2021.

This is my 22<sup>nd</sup> year with the Auxiliary and I am back at the helm of the Davidson Flotilla. Our Flotilla members have renewed energy and are once again dedicating themselves to the Auxiliary mission. We are looking forward to working with the leadership of Division 26 and other Flotillas to accomplish these missions.

# Stewart Family Memorial Award

## Presented to Darrin Sanchez , FC, 26-03



From left: CAPT Glendye, D. Sanchez, Z. Nazif.

Photo by D. Ray.

On 27 January 2024, Darrin Sanchez, FC of Flotilla 26-03 was presented the 2023 Stewart Family Memorial Award by Ziad Nazif, Division Commander of Division 054-26 during a quarterly meeting of Division 26. CAPT Troy Glendye, Chief Director of Auxiliary, was also on hand to congratulate Mr. Sanchez. The honor is awarded to a member of Division 26 who exemplifies outstanding cooperation and assistance in furthering the purpose and principles of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. Nominees are considered based on their accomplishments over the past year.

The award exists to honor three members of the David Stewart Family who were active Auxiliarists in Flotilla 26-03. In 2014, when Jeanette Stewart died, her husband,

Dave Stewart and the members of Flotilla 26-03 initiated the award to honor Jeanette who had served the Auxiliary in an exemplary way and in many capacities, including as Flotilla Commander. In 2019, Jeannette and Dave Stewart's daughter, Lisa Anne, passed away while she was serving as Flotilla Commander of Flotilla 26-03. Following the death of his daughter, Dave Stewart continued to serve in the Auxiliary, including many hours as a dedicated watch stander for all of Division 26. Following Dave's passing in 2022, the name of the award was changed to the Stewart Family Memorial Award.

The award is not always given to a member of Flotilla 26-03. In 2023, Steve Riggan of Flotilla 26-04 won the award for his exemplary service and contributions to Division 26.



*Jeanette Stewart*



*Dave and Lisa Stewart*

# Passing the Baton in Flotilla 26-04

Submitted by Sydney Newcombe, FC, Lake Norman West

My name is Sydney Newcombe and I am the newly elected Flotilla Commander for Flotilla 26-04. I have been a part of the USCG Auxiliary for four years. I want to be engaged in every aspect the Auxiliary has to offer. So far, I have gained certifications in PV, VE and TCO. I have also worked alongside Coast Guard Artificial Intelligence experts on a search and rescue project for almost two years. I want to continue to grow and expand my certifications, as well as my knowledge in boating safety. I strive to help build relationships and keep our community safe on the water.



As the new Commander, I share the following remarks with the members of Flotilla 26-04.

As Auxiliaries, each and every day we awake as part of a unique force that carries out an array of responsibilities, touching almost every facet of the U.S. maritime environment. Our Flotilla is a portion of that mighty force that brings water safety to recreational boating.

As I look out at 2024, there are four things I want us to look back on and say, "We did it."

## **1. Complete the tower and development of Station Blythe Landing**

We need to better serve the communication needs of the boating community. The radio tower at Blythe Landing will allow us to do that by giving us better coverage over the lake. In addition to better communication, my hope is that it will create greater visibility for the Coast Guard Auxiliary which will allow us to increase our role in boating safety and to better serve our community.

## **2. Set up our flotilla with the Push to Talk (PTT) service for those who wish to use it.**

While we must monitor VHF Channel 16 while on patrol and as a watchstander, the PTT service will be a separate secure communication line for our flotilla. The PTT service will improve our communication ability and increase our effectiveness on the water. Watchstanders will have the capability of GPS monitoring of our patrol facilities.

## **3. Rewrite and revise our Standing Rules**

Whether we have been in the Auxiliary for thirty years or just a couple of years, we know the rules and regulations of the Auxiliary are ever-changing. We need to update the Standing Rules to be sure we are all operating from the same playbook.

## **4. Increase in Number of Patrols**

The Coast Guard's motto is Semper Paratus, meaning "Always Ready." I want to see patrols going out regularly this boating season. I want to see multiple scheduling options, giving everyone more of an opportunity to participate in not only patrols but training throughout the boating season. I want the people on this lake to know that the USCG Auxiliary is always ready to lend a hand.

Next year, I want us to look back at 2024 and say to ourselves, "I am glad I was a part of something that was bigger than myself. That being our USCG Auxiliary Flotilla."

I am proud to serve as your Flotilla Commander for 2024.



# Flotilla 26-04 Lake Norman West Conducts Change of Watch on 13 January 2024



Ziad Nazif, DCDR, administers oath of office to Tony Marciano, VFC, and Sydney Newcombe, FC. Photo by E. Burk



Mark Born, IPFC is thanked for his service as Flotilla Commander 2021-2023. Photo by E. Burk



Flotilla Staff Officers take the oath of office as administered by Sydney Newcombe, FC. Photo by E. Burk

## Awards of Recognition

The following received awards for Exemplary Service:

- **Steven Riggan** for his leadership in establishing communication ability at Blythe Landing.
- **Jarrett Rheeder** for his leadership role for the Sea Scout's Long Cruise.
- **Sandra Stewart** for serving as FSO-IS for close to twenty years.
- **Sydney Newcombe** received the FC award.
- **Sharon Eifried** received the VFC award.



Gary Eifried receives 2023 Auxiliarist of the Year Award. Photo by E. Burk



Steven Riggan receives award for exemplary service. Photo by E. Burk

# Flotilla 26-05 Welcomes a Past Leader Back to the Helm

Submitted by Larry Mallonee, FC, Western Foothills



My name is Larry D. Mallonee and I am the FC for Flotilla 054-26-05 on Lake Hickory in North Carolina. I have been a member of the Auxiliary for 30 years. I signed up in December of 1993. In 2002, I was voted in as the first FC from the Hickory area. Our previous two FCs were from Lake Norman. I am the last original member of this flotilla.

My positions in the flotilla have been FC, VFC, FSO-PE, FSO-IS, FSO-VE and Coxswain. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as a member of the USCGAUX. The members that I have known over the years have been some outstanding people that have helped to shape this flotilla. At the current time we are a little low on personnel due to a range of factors, but I know that we will bounce back as we always have.

My time in the US Air Force allowed me to develop leadership skills that I have used not only in the auxiliary but also in my time as an instructor for Career and Technical Education at the junior high school, middle school, and high school levels for 23 years.

A major goal of the flotilla, other than recruitment, is setting up boating safety classes both online and in person. We hope to have them up and running before the end of February, 2024. It is a privilege to know that we will have assistance from members of Division 26. The leadership that the division has offered to this flotilla over the years has been extremely helpful to all of us.

I am not sure what I would be able to accomplish without the members of Flotilla 26-05: Ted Bost, Mauro Capobianco, Donald Trice, Jim Chimiak, Staley Keener, and Charles Mogyay. These are some of the finest men I have had the privilege of serving with. Several of these men are also Veterans and I am so proud of them for continuing their service to our communities and country.

The good Lord has blessed me with a wife of 50 years and two great adult children. I feel truly fortunate for my family and the many friends that I have. He has also blessed me with skills and knowledge that I have been able to use and apply over my lifetime.

# Flotilla 26-07 Badin Lake Conducts Change of Watch on 9 December 2023



Ziad Nazif, DCDR, administers oath of office to Brad Simpson (center), FC and Michael Mize, VFC. Photo by M. Pettigrew



The gang's all here! It was a fine day for many to gather to celebrate the passing of the baton from Don Murray to Brad Simpson. Mike Mize stands at the ready to serve as VFC.



Brad Simpson (right), incoming FC, presents end of tour award to Don Murray, outgoing FC. Photo by M. Pettigrew



Don Murray (left) and Jim Monroe present 2023 award to Tom Earnhardt. Photo by M. Pettigrew

# Sandra Stewart Wins District 5 Award



Sandra Stewart, a dedicated member of Flotilla 26-04, has been awarded a D5 High Five Award. The award was presented to Sandra at District 5 Southern Region D-Train in February 2023.

Sandra is recognized for her service in the many support and leadership positions she has held since she joined the Coast Guard Auxiliary in 2004. She has volunteered more than 7,000 hours!

The following are some of the areas where Sandra is serving now or has served in the past:

- Information Systems (IS), recording members hours for close to 20 years
- Auxiliary Scout (AS), supporting Sea Scout Ship 459
- Culinary Assistant (CA), serving up meals on Coast Guard cutters
- Human Resources (HR), helping prospective members become auxiliaries
- Vessel Examiner to assist in the Boating Safety program
- Crew Coxswain to conduct safety patrols on Lake Norman
- Instructor who now teaches TCT courses and mentors others
- D-Train registrar

The U.S. Coast Guard 5th District— Mid Atlantic, with headquarters in Portsmouth, Virginia, established the D5 High Five Award as part of an informal program that recognizes members for doing a great job in their normal day to day work. The goal is to thank persons who are simply doing a great job, every day.

Everyone who works for District 5 is eligible. That includes active duty personnel, reservists, civilians, and auxiliaries. To nominate someone for the award, email LT Emma Saunders, (D5 Flag Aide). There is no routing or formal nomination process. The email should describe what the individual is doing and how they are doing it well.

To read more about Sandra Stewart's award see the U.S. Coast Guard Mid-Atlantic Facebook site and scroll down to 16 February 2023

# Remarks From Officers of Cornelius Police Department Delivered at Flotilla 26-04 Change of Watch

*Officer George Brinzey from the Cornelius Police Department was invited to attend the Change of Watch of Flotilla 26-04. When he was unable to attend, he asked Officer Ian Clawson to deliver the following remarks.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm appreciation to each of you, from the Cornelius Police Department and all the Lake Norman public safety organizations. I want to express deep appreciation for the tireless dedication of Flotilla 26-04, whose commitment over the years has played a pivotal role in making Lake Norman a safer body of water for all.

Let us take a moment to appreciate the incredible collaboration with the Lake Norman Flotilla. Working under Flotilla Commander Mark Born's leadership has been a privilege. As we welcome incoming Flotilla Commanders Sydney Newcombe and Tony Marciano, our shared priority remains unwavering — to stand as a steadfast support mechanism, united in the common goal of enhancing safety on Lake Norman. A heartfelt thank you to each member present tonight; your dedication does not go unnoticed. We are genuinely grateful for this opportunity to share our thoughts with you.

Now, let us dive into the heart of the matter that is near and dear to us all — Folks coming back to the dock safe.

The recreational boating season of 2023 left an indelible splash, and not in the way we had hoped. Preventable drownings, where victims were not wearing flotation devices, has become an unfortunate standard. Over the last three years, more than 20 drownings occurred, almost all preventable and mostly involving rental boats. The common denominator: a lack of situational awareness. Whether it is the acting captain or someone on board, simply not being situationally prepared is a problem. Couple that with a lack of flotation, and we are faced with a serious issue, especially with a steady increase of new and novice boaters exploring Lake Norman's recreation.

It is high tide for a proactive sea change on Lake Norman's waters. The commercial use permit at Blythe Landing and the newly adopted rental and charter boat ordinance by the Lake Norman Marine Commission provide an opportunity to hold commercial companies accountable for adhering to boating safety protocols. Despite these strides, there's still a pressing need for a significant shift in how we educate and offer education for boating safety on Lake Norman.

In November 2021, the “Love Where You Lake” stakeholders meeting ignited a spark, bringing together 120 individuals and 80 local organizations committed to catalyzing change on Lake Norman. Fast forward to early 2022, Mecklenburg County Parks listened and we transformed the old commissary at Blythe Landing into the Waterfront Boating Safety and Education Center.

(Continued on next page.)



Officer Ian Clawson offers remarks at the Change of Watch for Flotilla 26-04.

Photo by E. Burke

## Officer Brinzey's Remarks Continued



This Center at Blythe Landing is not just a space; it is a beacon of change, embracing the Love Where You Lake initiative, a rallying cry for safer boating. It is not about one organization; it is about all of us coming together. The space has undergone a huge transformation, from gutting out the old restaurant equipment, to reconditioning with new flooring, and a fresh coat of paint. The center is move-in ready.

Now, let's talk specifics about the Boating Safety and Education Center:

Our mission at the Waterfront Boating Safety and Education Center is crystal clear. I think we can all agree that the mission is to elevate the quality of life for all residents, workers, and recreation enthusiasts by proactively reducing preventable accidents and fatalities. We are not just aiming for safety; we are aiming for an unparalleled boating safety experience for everyone.

Our vision is bold — to become the premier destination on Lake Norman, offering boating safety education and on-water programs for the public, all at no cost. Picture this: a training facility and resource hub for emergency responders, collaborative efforts with lake-related companies and organizations, and a multipartner safety and education information vestibule. This vestibule is not just an information center; it is a lifeline for boaters, providing critical safety information before they even set foot on the water.

Through our collaboration with Mecklenburg County Parks and the town of Cornelius, we've secured a lease for the space, turning it into a hub for emergency responders and a connection point for the recreational public. Working alongside Steve Riggan, our partnership with the Flotilla takes another exciting turn — envision a Communication Center within the facility. Steve's efforts with Duke and Meck Parks have been nothing short of monumental, indicating a bright future for this collaboration.

As we look ahead, this center isn't just a promise; it is a commitment to a safer Lake Norman. Furnished with an information vestibule and a designated vessel safety inspection station, the center will organically grow. It is not just a facility; it is a hub for in-class training opportunities and partnerships with the recreational public. It is a gathering place where we collectively focus on reducing preventable accidents and fatalities.

In conclusion, our gratitude knows no bounds for our partnership with the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary on Lake Norman. We are not just developing a boating safety and education center; we are strengthening our ties with the Lake Norman community. Together, we are setting sail into a safer, more enjoyable future.

Thank you all for your dedication, collaboration, and commitment to making Lake Norman a safer and more enjoyable place for everyone. Smooth waters and clear skies to you all!

Respectfully,  
George Brinzey

## Boating Safety Center at Blythe Landing

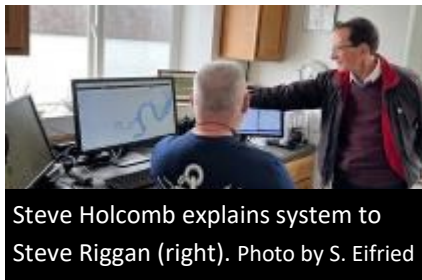
Many months ago, members of Flotilla 26-04, spearheaded by Steve Riggan, set out to find a way to install a radio tower or some other means of communication for watch standers on Lake Norman. Two previously used sites had become unavailable and the radio range was now inadequate. After much research, networking with local organizations and applying for grants, a way to improved communication has become a reality. Pending final approvals, a means of excellent radio capability will be installed at Blythe Landing.

Not only will Division 26 have improved communication, but will also have a dedicated space for watch standing and a training room in the soon-to-be open Joshua Murray Boating, Safety, Education and Awareness Center at a refurbished building at Blythe Landing in Huntersville, North Carolina. The center is named for a Cornelius, North Carolina police officer who died in 2021 after a medical emergency event while off duty. Joshua was a passionate advocate for boating safety.

Over the next two months, remodeling at the center will be completed, the space furnished and equipment purchased. The Dedication Ceremony of the center is planned for 18 May 2024. It will be just in time for Boating Safety Week.

## Successful Road Trip

Several members of Flotilla 26-04 took to the road in order to learn more about providing improved communication during safety patrols on Lake Norman using push-to-talk (PTT) software. Such a messaging program would greatly enhance the communication capability of Division 26 watch standers.



Steve Holcomb, VCDR of Division 05-08, and IPFC Flotilla 054-08-03, provided an opportunity for members of Flotilla 24-04, Steve Riggan, Allen James, FSO-CM, Gary Eifried, FSO-OP, and Sharon Eifried, TCO, to experience the PTT communications system used by Flotilla 83 at the Division 8 Search and Rescue Detachment on Claytor Lake, Virginia. Steve Holcomb shared that some of the advantages include real-time GPS

tracking, back-up communications, and recording of communications. Their system works seamlessly with members' current cell phones, and allows for communication with first responders from other agencies patrolling the lake.

At the present time, a team of communication experts in Division 26 are researching the best way to implement the use of a PTT system for safety patrols on Lake Norman and Lake Wylie. Telecommunications officers have oriented to the PTT system and are standing ready for the opportunity to learn more and go live.

## Get Ready! Rental Boats on Lake Norman Require VSCs



From left: Officer George Brinzey, LT Vaughn Griffin, Mark Briggs, John Dibbins, and Gary Eifried.

Photo by J. Cortes

On 15 February 2024, the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) held a public meeting at the Peninsula Yacht Club to discuss and answer questions about new permit regulations regarding rental boats on Lake Norman in North Carolina. As part of the permit process for non-charter boats, the LNMC has stipulated that a Coast Guard Auxiliary Vessel Safety Check (VSC) is one way to meet the required inspection for a permit.

In response to this new requirement for rental boats, Mark Briggs, SO-VE, has initiated a robust schedule for providing VSCs at local marinas and boat clubs. In addition, each FSO-VE is asked to reach out to the public to make available direct contact information to those who rent out boats. Vessel examiners are also asked to be alert and respond in a timely manner to requests that come through the "I want a VSC" website. Many boat owners are providing one or more of their boats for rent during the season and will need a VSC.



Persons who provide rental boats learn about new regulations on Lake Norman.

Photo by J. Cortes

## Mid-Atlantic 50th Boat Show 2024

Division 054-26 participated in the Mid-Atlantic Boat Show at the Charlotte Convention Center on 8-11 February 2024. Throughout the four days, Auxiliary members from several flotillas volunteered to meet the public and provide information about boating safety education available throughout the region.



From left: Z. Nazif, DCDR; B. Butlin, FSO-CS, SR, VE, Flotilla 26-02; M. Briggs, FC, SO-VE, Flotilla 26-02, D. Ray, VCDR.



Mark Briggs, FC, 26-02; and Landon Draper, 26-01 discuss boating safety education.



# Hot Topics

- **Register NOW for D-Train.** Dates: **April 4-7 at the Richmond Marriott in Short Pump, Virginia.** See brochure at: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/bbdec73f-2d16-4535-be63-c1949f9776f9>. Do not miss the opportunity to take classes in Leadership, CPR, TCT, Communications, Operations, VE, Social Media, and Paddle Craft; to network with shipmates from multiple divisions in District 5 South; and to hear from Sector Commanders and DIRAUX.
- **Save the Date: 18 May 2024.** Plan to attend the **Dedication Ceremony for the Joshua Murray Boating, Safety, Education and Awareness Center at Blythe Landing** at 15901 NC Highway 73, Huntersville, North Carolina. Stay alert for more details and confirmation of date.
- **Chance to Make a Difference.** Three Division 26 committees need members. Contact Dave Ray, VCDR to volunteer.
  1. Assist with goal to enhance the viability of two struggling Division 26 flotillas.
  2. Investigate possible change to Division 26 Change of Watch venue.
  3. Participate in the Division Awards Committee.
- **Boat America Classes.** Spread the word.
  - Division 26 has **fourteen** "Boat America" boating safety classes scheduled for 2024. More information and registration can be found at: [https://cgaux.org/boatinged/class\\_finder/](https://cgaux.org/boatinged/class_finder/)
- **National Surface Operations Workshop 2024.** All coxswains, crew, PWC operators, paddle craft operators, and trainees **must complete the workshop by 30 June 2024.** The workshop presentations **must be delivered by a certified instructor** who is qualified in the respective program. If you need the workshop, contact Jim Loftin, SO-OP.
- **National Telecommunications Workshop 2024. Strongly recommended** for operators and owners of Auxiliary Radio Facilities, Telecommunications Officers (TCO), or training for TCO qualification. The workshop presentations **must be delivered by a certified instructor** who is qualified in the respective program. If you need this workshop, contact Jim Loftin, SO-CM.
- **National Vessel Examiner (VE) Workshop 2024.** All certified VEs and those training to become VEs **must complete the workshop by 30 June 2024.** The VE workshop presentations are located at the National V-Directorate website (in the Member zone) at [2024 National VE Workshop](#). The **self-attestation form must be submitted to your FSO-VE and to SO-IS staff officer, Chris Craig (ccraig.uscg@gmail.com).**
- **National Instructor (IT) Workshop 2024.** All certified ITs and those training to become ITs are **encouraged** to complete the workshop. The [2024 IT workshop is located at the E-Directorate, Pubic Education, under](#)

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Feedback, articles, pictures are most welcome and should be sent to: Sharon Eifried, Editor, [seifried@towson.edu](mailto:seifried@towson.edu).

