

FLOT Lines

Flotilla 74, Brandon

Issue 5 2025





FLOT Lines

Newsletter Flotilla 74, Brandon
Matthew Stephen, Flotilla Commander
Christopher Hunt, Flotilla Vice Commander
Meeting: Second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.
3006 South Kings Ave., Brandon, Florida

Flotilla Staff Officers

Tanner Piliego
Information Systems

Vishrut Amin
Communication Services

Earl Abbott
Finance

Christopher Hunt
Communications

Toshiya Arciaga
Member Training

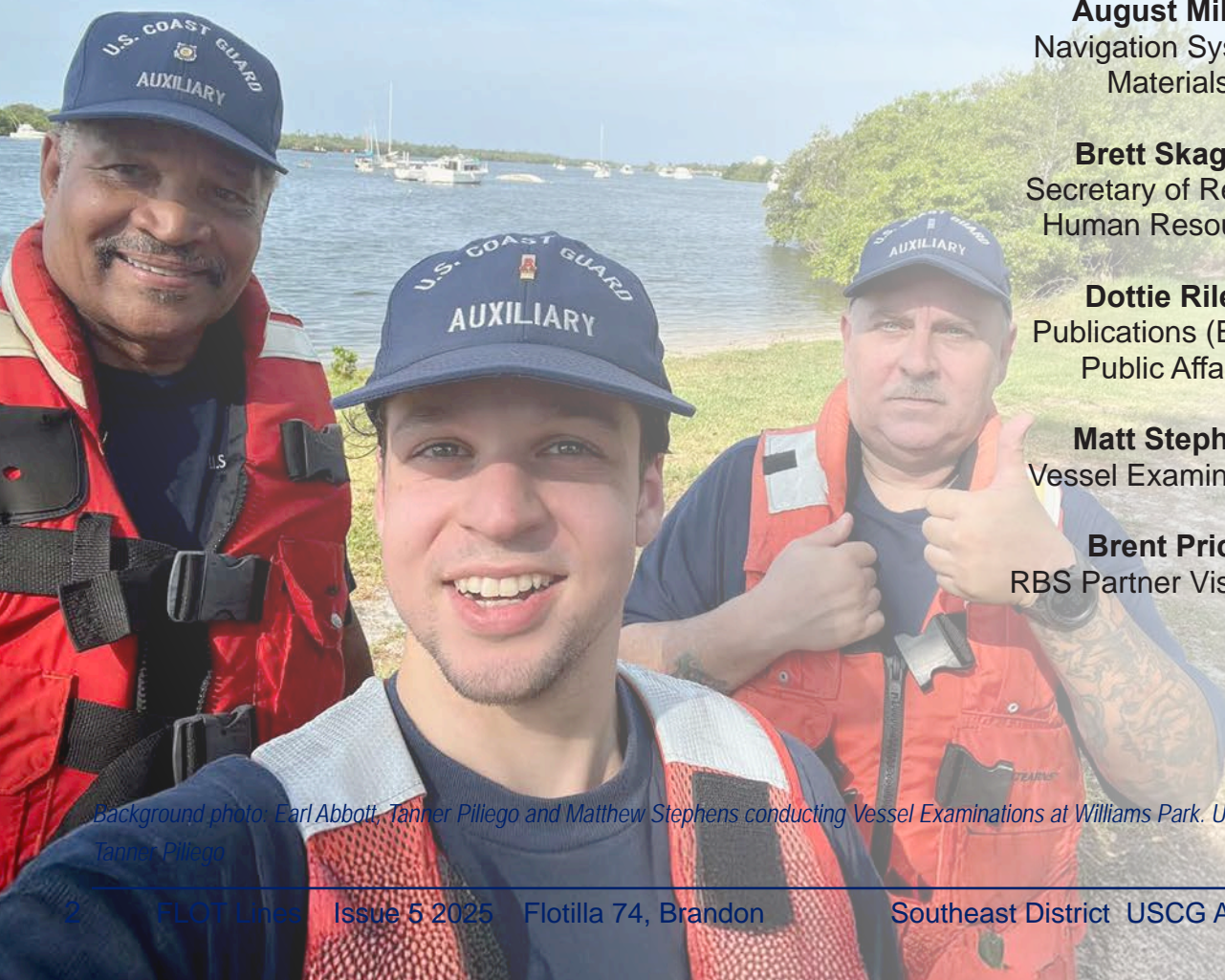
August Miller
Navigation Systems
Materials

Brett Skaggs
Secretary of Records
Human Resources

Dottie Riley
Publications (Editor)
Public Affairs

Matt Stephen
Vessel Examinations

Brent Price
RBS Partner Visitations



Background photo: Earl Abbott, Tanner Piliego and Matthew Stephens conducting Vessel Examinations at Williams Park. USCG Auxiliary photo by Tanner Piliego



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We're on the web!

www.cgaux74.org



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Flotilla74/>

Cover photo: Seaman Ty Etzer, Station St. Petersburg, on an area familiarization and SAR training mission with Division 7 Auxiliarists. USCG Auxiliary photograph by Matt Stephen.

A dolphin surfaces near a channel marker in Tampa Bay. USCG Auxiliary photo by George Papabelis.



From the Helm



Matthew Stephen
Flotilla Commander

I'm excited to see many of our new members getting qualified and certified in several areas. We have had new members qualify for Program Visitor, Vessel Examiner, and Citizenship Verifier. I am encouraged by this as I see our flotilla growing. Other areas of service from our members are boat crew, Telecommunications Operator, and two members working at Air Station Clearwater, providing direct service to Coast Guard members. For your information: if you are interested in becoming a Telecommunications Operator or owning a marine radio, contact former member, Bill Sage. Bill has accumulated several radios and other communications equipment through his radio club and is willing to part with some of it to any member sincerely interested.

As we look ahead to 2026, I encourage each of you to set a personal or team goal—whether it's pursuing a new qualification, taking on a leadership role, or supporting our community in new ways. Let's continue to build on our success together! Ω

Two other relevant points worth repeating:

Two other relevant points worth repeating:

ALAux 036/25:

1. Recommendation: **REDUCE THE AUXILIARY RECRUITING SERVICE AWARD CRITERIA FROM 7 MEMBERS PER YEAR TO 3 PER YEAR.**
2. Discussion: In any given year, very few members achieve this award due to the high number of new members one must recruit.
3. The Auxiliary is losing members at a rate of 2.5%/year
4. Most Districts lose more members than they bring in each year. Decreasing the criteria for this award to three new members per year should increase

interest in achieving this award and increase our membership overall substantially

5. If approved, these changes would take effect for calendar year 2024 with the award being considered in 2025.

ALAux037/25

ALAux 008/25 "**TEMPORARY UPDATE TO AUXILIARY CORE TRAINING**," announced that the Civil Rights Awareness (CRA) course and the Sexual Assault Prevention, Response, and Recovery (SAPRR) course are under review and being updated by Coast Guard subject matter experts.

1. The CRA and SAPRR courses, which are Auxiliary Core Training (AUXCT) courses and are a requirement for all Auxiliarists, were made available again in the Auxiliary Online Classroom "Moodle" today. Auxiliarists who need to complete their CRA and SAPRR courses to meet their AUXCT requirements and avoid being placed in Required Yearly Not Met (REYR) status have until December 31, 2025, to do so.
2. If an Auxiliarist is sensitive to the content of the SAPRR course, they may elect to "opt out" of the online course. Electing to "opt out" may involve extra time commitments. In this case, the opt-out option for the online course is taking the course in an alternative way (i.e., having a private conversation with a Coast Guard District Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC)). Only SARCs are authorized to know and provide the "opt-out" code.

For more information, please read the bulletin found at: <https://www.uscgaux.info/content.php?unit=BX-GROUP&category=2025-alaux>

Reprinting the important points of each of these ALAux bulletin in case you deleted them from your mail before reading them. Always read ALAux bulletins before deleting them. Ω



From the Helm

As we end the 2025 calendar year, I want to thank everyone in our flotilla for being such great members. Over the past year, we have onboarded three new members, all of whom are presently holding Flotilla Staff Officer positions; two prospects have submitted applications; and my daughter, Haylee Skaggs, was made an honorary member and she will be leaving for USCG Boot Camp in April 2026. Unfortunately, we lost one young member to disenrollment, but we are glad to report that Vy Pham has also joined the USCG Active Duty using the Auxiliary as a segway into the Coast Guard.

As we enter 2026, I have decided to step down as Flotilla Staff Officer-Human Resources and hand that responsibility to Brent Price, who currently serves as our Flotilla Staff Officer-Partner Visitations. This change will allow me to grow within the Auxiliary as I am your incoming Flotilla Vice Commander. In addition to being Flotilla Vice Commander, I will continue to hold the Flotilla Staff Officer-Secretary of Records and Division Staff Officer-Secretary of Records positions.

This year, we rebuilt our core Flotilla Staff Officer group by promoting new members who demonstrate dedication and a willingness to uphold Coast Guard values. This change has had a positive impact, ensuring that uniform inspections were completed on time, finances were reconciled, and

member training increased. Yet we still have a couple of members to catch up with. In addition, Communication Services has drastically improved with the revamped flotilla website, division website, and internal and external communications, ensuring quicker response times and more member information.

Looking ahead to 2026, I have a few personal goals I would like to achieve, as well as continuing to build the flotilla brand within the community in several ways. Join me in bringing in a safe and fun 2026. Semper Paratus!

Brett Skaggs, Flotilla Vice Commander (e)
FSO-SR, SO-SR

Brett Skaggs discusses
Auxiliary programs and activities at Salt Strong Fishing Club on Oct. 15, 2025.
Photo by Haylee Skaggs.
Illustrative edits (fades) by
Dorothy Riley.



From the North Sea to Lake Erie: An Auxiliarist's Find During a Difficult Time

By Brett Skaggs

"If anything's gonna happen, its gonna happen out there".

This is a famous line from the 1992 movie, "Captain Ron" about a family that inherits a boat, yet knows nothing about sailing.

Most, if not everyone, knows about the United States Coast Guard and what they do, but many people don't know about the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary and what we do.

Recently, my wife's family lost both of their parents due to medical reasons in Cleveland, Ohio, this year. Norbert, 96 years old, and Ursula, 91 years old, relocated from Bremen, Germany, to North America after World War II. I heard the stories of the StarCraft boat BREMEN when the kids were growing up, and the time spent on Lake Erie. Still, it wasn't until after the passing of "Oma and Opa" that I came across some USCG Auxilia-

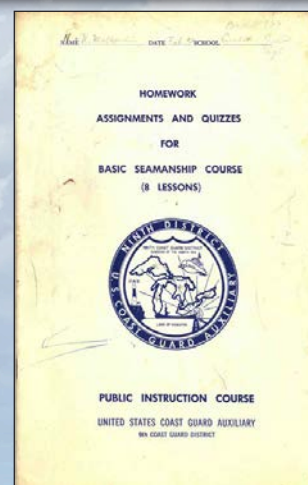
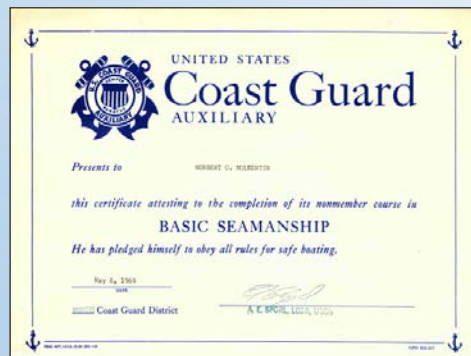
ry study materials and certificates that Norbert had received for completing "Basic Seamanship" in 1969, in what was then the 9th Coast Guard District.

As a member of the Southeast District in Tampa Bay, this was an incredible find and demonstrates the dedication of not only the Coast Guard Auxiliary throughout the years, but also boaters seeking to learn and comply with boating regulations in the community.

Fifty-six years later, I can say that the Auxiliary still holds strong with its unwavering commitment to boating safety across the country, and we should be proud of each member who volunteers their time, energy, and resources to continue this great work.

Semper Paratus! Ω_

(More photographs by Brett on following page.)



Background: CGC NEAH BAY (WTGB-105) is a 140-foot Bay Class Icebreaking Tug homeported in Cleveland, OH. Unit missions include Icebreaking, Homeland Security, Light House projects, Law Enforcement, and Public Affairs. The NEAH BAY serves throughout the entire Great Lakes system. USCG Auxiliary photo by Brett Skaggs. (Note: Photo digitally altered to extend the sky.)





The United States Coast Guard Station on Whiskey Island is located on the west pier at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland. It was decommissioned in 1976 when the Coast Guard moved its base, and the historic structure sat abandoned for many years. Under the aegis of the Cleveland Metroparks, the Coast Guard Station is slowly being restored. The Foundry, Cleveland's community rowing and sailing center, has installed new boat docks and periodically hosts regattas and high

school and collegiate sailing team practices. And once a year, the Station is pressed into service for the annual Burning River Fest, a panoply of beer, food, and entertainment. In 2013, the US Coast Guard Station was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Photo by Brett Skaggs

Right: Natalie Skagg's family on her "Oma and Opa's" boat, BREMEN. It would appear that Norbert and Ursula Molkentin took boating safety seriously as all of the younger children are wearing life jackets. Family photo provided by Natalie Skaggs.



Articles of Interest

One Year in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary: A Journey of Service, Leadership, and Growth.

By Vishrut Amin

Reflecting on my first year in the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, I am filled with gratitude and pride. I joined the Auxiliary in September 2024, initially seeking a way to give back to my community. What I didn't expect was the transformation it would bring not only in terms of service but also through leadership, learning, and personal growth. For anyone considering joining or those already in the Auxiliary who are hesitant to take on a leadership role, let me share my journey and how it may inspire you to take the next step.

The Start of My Journey

I'll never forget the day I received a call from Mr. William Sage, the Flotilla Staff Officer-Human Resources. He was my first point of contact in the Auxiliary. We had a great conversation, exchanging information and insights, and I remember feeling excitement and nervousness. I knew I was about to embark on something new, but I had no idea how much it would change me.

Walking into my first Coast Guard Auxiliary flotilla meeting, I was like many newcomers, curious, maybe a little nervous, and unsure of what to expect. I was intrigued by the idea of serving in a uniformed organization alongside the Coast Guard, where I could contribute to community outreach, boating safety, and search-and-rescue operations.

However, there were also doubts: Would I be able to make a meaningful contribution? Would I have the time? What would I really be doing?

As it turns out, I wasn't alone in these thoughts. Many people join the Auxiliary with similar uncertainties, wanting to give back but unsure about where they fit in. It wasn't until I took the leap and got involved that I

realized the profound impact the Auxiliary has, not just on the communities we serve, but on the growth of its members.

The Power of Service: A Role for Everyone

From day one, I was welcomed by a diverse and passionate group of individuals who guided me through the basic qualification process (BQ). Whether participating in Program Visitation, conducting Vessel Safety Checks, or helping out at public events, the

service opportunities were endless. I quickly learned that every contribution, no matter how small, makes a difference. The Auxiliary needs all kinds of people, whether you're fresh out of high school, retired, tech-savvy, a natural communicator, a seasoned leader, or someone eager to learn new skills. There is a place for you in the Auxiliary.

The more I volunteered, the more I realized that leadership isn't just about personal growth. It's about amplifying the positive impact we have on others, building connections, having fun, and growing together. The more we step up, the greater the difference we can make in our communities.

Leadership and Growth: The Value of Holding Office

One of the key lessons I've learned this year is the true power of leadership. The Auxiliary isn't just about fulfilling tasks; it's about

setting an example, building a culture of teamwork, and inspiring others to get involved. Taking on an office within the Auxiliary can be a transformative experience, not just for you, but for the entire flotilla.

In March 2025, I assumed the role of Flotilla Staff Of-



At the July 8, 2025, meeting of Flotilla 74, Brandon, Vishrut Amin was presented the certificate for earning the Operational Auxiliarist Device. USCG Auxiliary photo.

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Articles of Interest

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ficer for Program Partner Visitations, and Communication Systems within Flotilla 74. I was excited, but uncertain whether I was the right fit for either position. Fortunately, I had great mentors who guided me through the responsibilities and helped me navigate the administrative side. This mentorship, combined with the hands-on learning, allowed me to update the flotilla website and strengthen our digital presence, all while ensuring that our members had the resources they needed to succeed. There is something deeply fulfilling about helping others find their place in the Auxiliary and setting the direction for the flotilla's work.

Encouraging Others: Take the Next Step

No matter how big or small, every office offers you more than just a chance to serve your country and community. It's an opportunity to build new skills, challenge yourself, and improve yourself. Every contribution is valuable, whether you're working behind the scenes in administration or directly with the public. It is the leadership roles that allow you to multiply that value, creating a ripple effect that impacts everyone you work with.

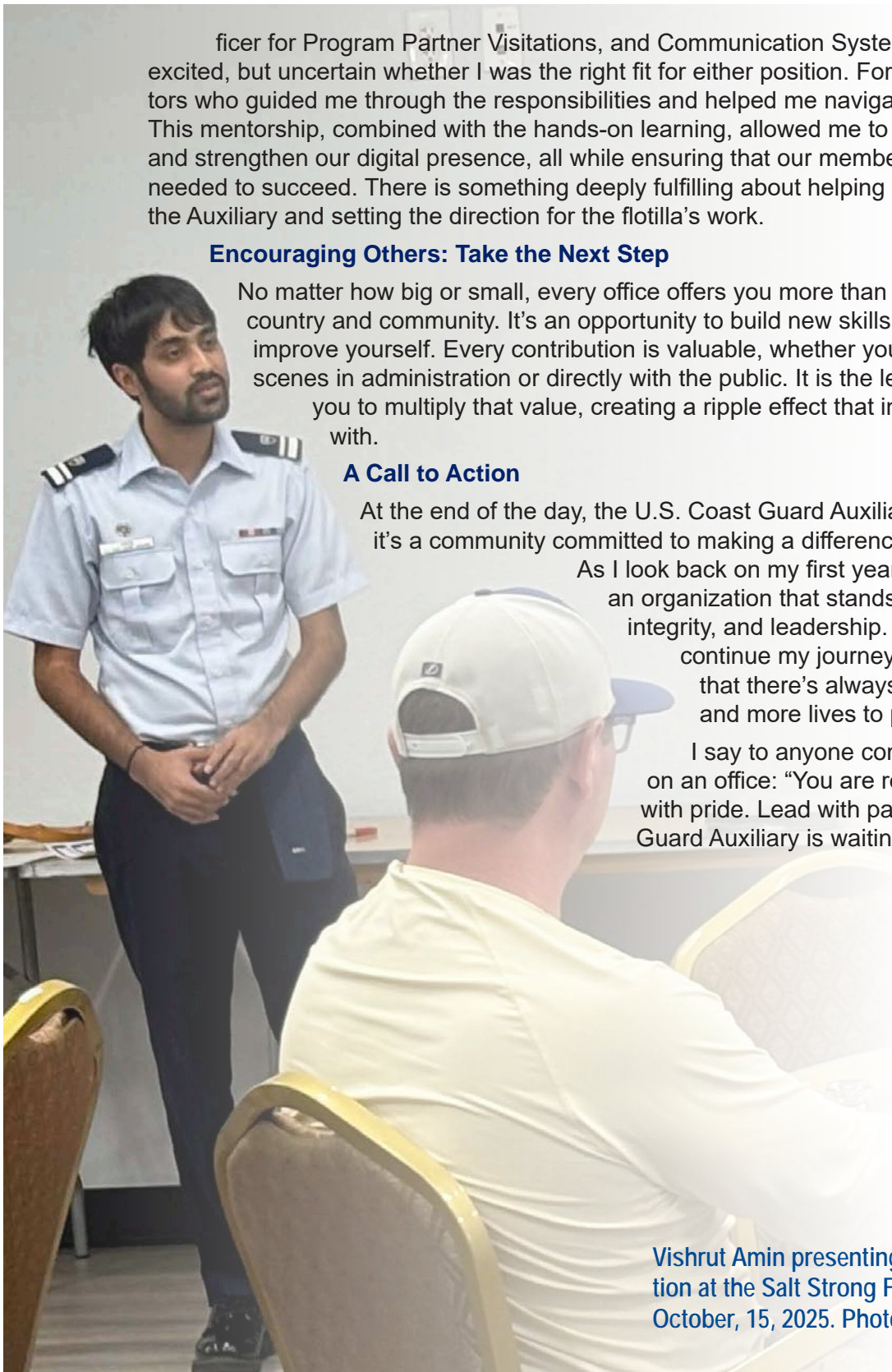
A Call to Action

At the end of the day, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary isn't just a service, it's a community committed to making a difference, one mission at a time.

As I look back on my first year, I'm proud to be part of an organization that stands as a beacon of service, integrity, and leadership. I'm even more excited to continue my journey with the Auxiliary, knowing that there's always more to learn, more to do, and more lives to positively impact.

I say to anyone considering joining or taking on an office: "You are ready. Take the leap. Serve with pride. Lead with passion." The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is waiting for you. Ω

Vishrut Amin presenting boating safety information at the Salt Strong Fishing Club in Tampa on October, 15, 2025. Photograph by Haylee Skaggs.



Articles of Interest

Flotilla 74 Members Visit Tampa's Salt Strong Fishing Club.

By Brett Skaggs

Flotilla 74, Brandon, was recently invited to give a presentation about the USCG Auxiliary and on what we do to the Salt Strong Fishing Club at the Egypt Shriners Hall in Tampa. This was a fantastic opportunity to see what local fishing clubs are doing within the community, not just focusing on fishing and boating, but also on environmental issues. In attendance from Flotilla 74, Brandon, on Oct. 15, 2025, were members Brett Skaggs, Vishrut Amin, and Brent Price, along with Brett's daughters, Haylee and Alexa.

The folks at Salt Strong provided a wealth of valuable information, including their support in reducing invasive species by transporting vessels from different bodies of water and installing shore mats to promote vegetation growth and structure along the Skyway. At the meeting's end, the fishing club conducted a 50/50 and reverse raffle, with Flotilla 74 members winning some prizes.

At the meeting, Brett, Vishrut, and Brent delivered a PowerPoint presentation covering topics including boating safety and boater education courses, visitor programs, public education initiatives, environmental and disaster response protocols, communications strategies, and publications/public affairs. They opened with some great jokes and laughs that broke the ice. During the presentation, they were open to questions to engage the Salt Club members.

Most of the Salt Strong members initially thought that the Auxiliary was only a nuisance to be avoided at the boat ramps, but once they saw how the Auxiliary works with active duty Coast Guard and our boating safety initiatives, the feeling in the room quickly changed, with some asking, "What don't you



Articles of Interest

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guys do?"

At the end of the presentation, Brett, Vishrut, and Brent opened the floor for questions and answers, and were flooded with queries and comments that even this knowledgeable group had to get back with to answer.

The evening was a rewarding experience for the members of Salt Strong Fishing Club and Flotilla 74, Brandon. Ω

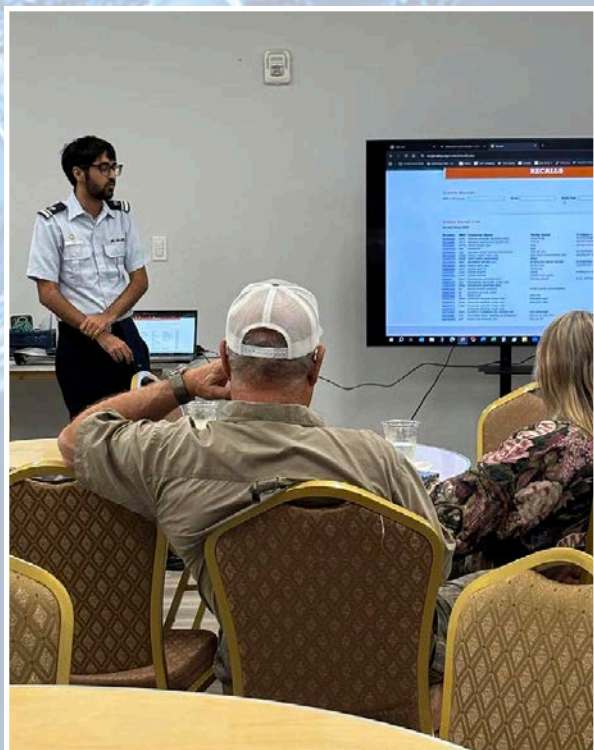
Page 10 from top down: Vishrut Amin and Brett Skaggs take turns presenting information about the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Auxiliary's boating safety program to the Salt Strong Fishing Club on October 15.

Vishrut Amin (third from left), Brent Price (fifth from left), and Brett Skaggs (fourth from right) pose in a group photo with the members of the

Salt Strong Fishing Club.

Lower image, page 10: Brent Price (in foreground) looks over at the room filled with attendees of the Salt Strong Fishing Club.

Page 11, from top down: Members of the Salt Strong Fishing Club remained engaged asking questions and exchanging information after the meeting ended and most attendees had gone home.



Bottom left: Vishrut Amin takes a turn presenting information to the fishing club.

Bottom right: A member of the fishing club asks a question during the question-and-answer segment. Photographs by Haylee Skaggs.



Articles of Interest



Lithia Springs Conservation Park: Members get together for fun and camaraderie.

By Haylee Skaggs, Honorary Member of Flotilla 74, Brandon and USCG Recruit.

On November 8, 2025, members of Flotilla 74 hosted a social gathering at Lithia Springs Conservation Park. All members were invited to attend with their friends and families.

The gathering began at 2 P.M. and ended at 5:30 P.M. Auxiliary members Brett Skaggs, George Humphrey, Earl Abbott, Vishrut Amin, Toshiya Arciaga, Brian Cirola, and their families attended, as did new member candidate Matthew Genson. Park Ranger Gavin, Lifeguards Haylee (Skaggs), Ansley, Keily, Jaydon, Kyle, and Bella stopped by for food and refreshments during their rotations at the spring, and their support was instrumental in making the event successful.

At the October 14, 2025, meeting, all members were asked to donate any amount toward the barbecue. The flotilla initially raised approximately \$140. To increase funds, Brett Skaggs and Honorary Member Haylee Skaggs set up a donation box on the lifeguard

stand every weekend for six weeks before the event. Thanks to visitors to the natural spring, we raised an additional \$130, bringing our total to nearly \$270. We spent \$162 on food, drinks, grilling essentials, and cleaning supplies, leaving \$107 for future events or expenses. We also made this a public affairs event by placing an Auxiliary box with boating safety information for children and adults.

This event was made possible by member Vishrut Amin, who created a Google sign-up form on the flotilla website to maximize member participation across different dates and times. We also thank Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation for donating the shelters and ice, and for allowing us to use their park for the day, demonstrating strong community collaboration. Ω



Articles of Interest



Images: Previous page: The point where the crystal clear springs merge with the murkier waters of the Alafia River. Original photo by SunSentinel.com

This page, top and bottom photo: Flotilla members and their families enjoy the food and camaraderie. They had fun getting to know each other and taking short hikes on the nearby trails. USCG Auxiliary photographs by Brett Skaggs.



One of the park's great features is the presence of two adjoining playgrounds for toddlers to five-year-olds, and five to twelve-year-olds. Photo courtesy Mapquest.

The springs are a constant 72 degrees and are a popular swimming spot year-round. The park maintained by Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation, is also known for its camp sites, kayaking and hiking trails.



Staff Reports and Meeting News

Earl Abbott-Finance

All financial records are current, and finance reports are included at the meetings for review and approval.



August Miller-Materials

No requests for materials pending.

Brett Skaggs-Secretary of Records

Meeting Minutes are current, and have been made available for review and approval at flotilla meetings.

Brett Skaggs-Human Resources:

Two member applications have been submitted, and prospective applicants have paid the 2026 dues.

Brent Price will officially take over the Flotilla Staff Officer-Human Resources role from me, as I will be stepping up as Flotilla Vice Commander for 2026. November already shows promise as Brent is in talks with a prospect who reached out via the division email, and we will be sending him some additional information this week. I will continue to support Brent in Human Resources duties until a full transition is completed to ensure his success in his new role.

Tanner Piliego-Information Services

All hours submitted by flotilla members for October to the Flotilla Staff Officer-Information Services have been recorded.

We have had one 7006 transfer request which is being processed.

Vishrut Amin-Communication Systems

The flotilla webpage has been completely revamped and is constantly updated to reflect new information.

Dorothy Riley-Publications

I am one month behind in my publication schedule for 2025 but will never-the-less attempt to publish six issues for 2025. Be sure to keep taking photographs and articles, and thanks to all who contribute so regularly.

Toshiya Arciaga-Member Training

Achievements and certifications of members as of September 2025:

- Tosh Arciaga was certified as a Vessel Examiner and Recreational Boating Safety-Partner Visitor
- Brent Price was certified as a Recreational Boating Safety-Partner Visitor and is now Flotilla Staff Officer-Program Visitor.
- Vishrut Amin has completed S-242.C: Effective Communication.
- Brent Price completed the Leadership Competency Courses, Levels 1-5, S-242.C: Effective Communication, Auxiliary Food Service Sanitation, and the Vessel Examiner Workshop.
- Brett Skaggs completed the Auxiliary Flotilla Leadership Course, Introduction to Marine Safety and Environmental Protection, and the Goodmate course.
- Dottie Riley, Tanner Piliego, George Humphrey, and August Miller completed the Suicide Prevention Course.

Have successfully reengaged with some inactive members.



Above: Dorothy Riley, Immediate Past Flotilla Commander, presents Brent Price the Vessel Examiner Qualification certificate and ribbon at the Flotilla 74 Business meeting on October 10, 2025. USCG Auxiliary photo.



Staff Reports and Meeting News



Left: Dorothy Riley, Immediate Past Flotilla Commander, presents Vy Pham a Meritorious Team Commendation and ribbon at the Flotilla 74 business meeting on October 10, 2025. This was Vy Pham's last meeting as she is scheduled to enter the Coast Guard. USCG Auxiliary photo.

Opportunities:

- Continue to reach out to members to reengage with flotilla and complete CORE and BQII training, and Intro to Risk Management course
- Encourage active members to take additional leadership courses, focus on Administrative Procedures Course, Auxiliary Flotilla Leadership Course, and LCC Level 1
- Twelve members still need to take Suicide Prevention course. Emails sent to remind members

Challenges:

Unable to connect and make contact with many non active members

Members are not logging their hours or are logging using incorrect codes. Ω



Tony Hooper, Division Commander, congratulates Brett Skaggs for his unanimous election as Flotilla Vice Commander. Tony Hooper attended the Flotilla 74, Brandon, meeting on November 11 to witness the flotilla's election. Matthew Stephen was reelected as Flotilla Commander, and Brett Skaggs was elected Flotilla Vice Commander. USCG Auxiliary photo by Haylee Skaggs

(More meeting photos on next page.)



Staff Reports and Meeting News



Tony Hooper, Division Commander, presents a **Certificate of Appreciation** from Flotilla 74, Brandon, to Vishrut Amin for his efforts in organizing the Flotilla 74 barbecue at Lithia Springs Conservation Park. Brett Skaggs also received a **Certificate of Appreciation** for his efforts in organizing the barbecue. USCG Auxiliary photo by Haylee Skaggs



Tony Hooper, Division Commander, presents a **Certificate of Appreciation** from Flotilla 74, Brandon, to Haylee Skaggs for her many contributions to the Flotilla 74 barbecue, including securing a pavilion at Lithia Springs Conservation Park. In addition to the **Certificate of Appreciation**, the flotilla presented Haylee with an honorary membership certificate. Haylee will be entering Coast Guard basic training in the spring. USCG Auxiliary photo by Brett Skaggs



Stephen Assists Station St. Petersburg in Standby Mission.

By Matthew Stephen



Matt Stephen served as crew for an Auxiliary facility on search and rescue standby at Station St. Petersburg on Nov. 22, 2025. Dean Hoskin was the coxswain, while Matt Stephen and Raul Lopez, Flotilla Vice Commander, Flotilla 78, St. Pete Beach served as crew.

One of the highlights of their day was seeing USCGC Harold Miller docked at Station. The cutter's tag is "Gallantry in Action."

They did not spend their entire time waiting for a search-and-rescue callout. They conducted search-and-rescue training with Coast Guard Seaman Ty Fitzer, who they took on a familiarization mission and for search-and-rescue training, which included man-overboard practice, throwing a line for simulated tow practice, and weighing the anchor. Ω



Mid-page, left: Seaman Ty Fitzer prepares to throw a line.

Above: Seaman Fitzer prepares the anchor line prior to weighing for depth.



Far Left and center: Fitzer takes a turn at the helm. Dean Hoskin is beside him and Raul Lopez is seen behind them. USCG Auxiliary photographs by Dorothy Riley



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USCGA-P

FLOT is a military acronym meaning "forward line of own troops." FLOT line or "forward edge of battle area" (FEBA) are technical terms used by all branches of the U.S. armed services to designate the forward most friendly maritime or land forces on the battlefield at a given point in time during an armed conflict.

We are not a military force engaged in armed conflict. We are, however, the front-line of the struggle to save the lives of recreational boaters, and we face this great endeavor armed with Vessel Safety Checks, Public Education classes and all the other Recreational Boating Safety programs in our arsenal. Our newsletter banner serves as a reminder of this mission.

FLOT Lines is a publication of Flotilla 74, Brandon, Southeast District United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, located at 3006 S. Kings Ave., Brandon. The Auxiliary an organization of dues-paying unpaid, civilian volunteers whose mission is to assist the U.S. Coast Guard in promoting boating safety. Articles may be reprinted with the express consent of the author or photographer with proper credit given to same. For permissions or for more information, please contact the editor, Dorothy Riley, SO-PB, Email address: dottieriley@gmail.com

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Be sure to attend flotilla meetings

When: 2nd Tuesday, 7 p.m.

Where: Flotilla 74, Brandon

3006 S. KINGS AVE, Brandon, FL

***Why: Membership is more rewarding
when you participate-
and bring a friend!***