

For Immediate Release
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
Southeast District
Flotilla 91, Fort Myers Beach, Florida
Contact: Daniel Eaton
Public Affairs Officer
cgaux91d7publicaffairs@gmail.com
239-425-7914
Follow Us: Facebook.com/AUX91FMB | www.Aux91FMB.org

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91 to Celebrate 20 Years of Service at Station Fort Myers Beach During January Change of Watch Ceremony

By Daniel Eaton, Public Affairs Officer, Plank Owner, US Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91, Fort Myers Beach.

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91 will mark a significant milestone this January as it celebrates 20 years of dedicated service alongside Coast Guard Station Fort Myers Beach during its annual Change of Watch Ceremony. The event, steeped in Coast Guard tradition, formally transfers leadership between outgoing and incoming officers while honoring past achievements and reaffirming the Auxiliary's enduring commitment to mission support.

This year's ceremony carries special significance. In 2006, then-Officer in Charge, Chief Warrant Officer Pete Louzao, recognized the value the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary could bring to a small boat station. He was instrumental in the chartering of Flotilla 91 to Station Fort Myers Beach. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary was chartered by Congress in 1939. The Auxiliary exists to assist the Coast Guard in carrying out authorized missions. What followed over the next two decades far exceeded expectations.

Since its establishment at Station Fort Myers Beach, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 91 has provided extraordinary and sustained operational support. Volunteers have contributed more than **125,300 sustained service hours**, plus:

- Over **10,000 hours** of surface operations
- More than **9,000 hours** of radio watchstanding
- Over **7,500 hours** of direct administrative support
- More than **4,000 program visits to marinas and facilities**
- Over **2,400 free recreational vessel safety examinations**

Auxiliary members routinely augmented station personnel, backfilled operational roles during holidays and surge periods, supported patrols, and even provided culinary services—answering the call whenever and wherever needed.

Training is central to the Coast Guard mission, embodied in the station motto: *Train, Maintain, Operate*. Flotilla 91 played a key role in two-boat training evolutions. Some members served as U.S. Coast Guard Qualified Boat Crew Members, and others used their own vessels as target vessels for search and rescue and boarding team exercises. Auxiliarists acted as unscripted role-players aboard non-standard vessels, giving boarding teams realistic, real-world experience beyond classroom instruction. These efforts strengthened operational readiness for both U.S. Coast Guard and Auxiliary crews. Members of Flotilla 91 also appeared as role-players in a Coast Guard segment of *America's Most Wanted* filmed offshore of Fort Myers Beach.

Operational crews from Flotilla 91 maintained critical safety zones during the intentional sinking of the USCGC Mohawk. This 165-foot, World War II-era vessel now serves as Florida's first military-ship artificial reef, established as a permanent tribute to the veteran community.

Beyond local waters, Flotilla 91's impact reached the international stage. Public Education instructors participated in the Department of Defense–led **Enduring Friendship Initiative**, delivering classroom instruction on crew responsibilities, basic seamanship, marlinspike, basic navigation, and charting to maritime forces of Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Jamaica, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and Panama. This multi-year effort enhanced partner nations' abilities to respond to maritime threats and emergencies throughout the Caribbean.

Operational excellence extended to international competition, with Flotilla 91 sending members to compete in the **International Search and Rescue Competition** alongside the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Public outreach remained a cornerstone of service. Flotilla 91's Public Affairs team appeared on **ABC7, Fox 4, ESPN Radio, Beach Talk Radio**, and other media outlets promoting boating safety and the **Waterway Watch Program**, encouraging vigilance against maritime threats. Members delivered paddle sports safety demonstrations at community pools, supported the "Fit to Float" initiative, and worked with local governments to secure proclamations recognizing **National Safe Boating Week**. Our outreach programs successfully brought the safe boating message to local schools and professional organizations, as well as thousands of fans at regional minor league baseball and hockey games.

The flotilla partnered with **Safe Kids Southwest Florida** to establish and support life jacket loaner stations at local beaches and boat ramps, directly improving water safety for residents and visitors alike.

Flotilla 91's service also included unique operational deployments. Auxiliary member L. McCaffrey deployed aboard several Coast Guard cutters as an interpreter, including Indo-Pacific patrols combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. During **Operation Blue**

Pacific, her contributions aboard **USCGC Munro** were instrumental to mission success, with ship leadership noting her exceptional initiative and performance beyond expectations.

Closer to home, members supported the **Marine Safety Detachment Fort Myers**, contributing hundreds of on-call hours responding to pollution incidents across Southwest Florida. Others served in the **AuxAir** program as air observers and aircrew, flying offshore search and rescue and maritime security patrols.

Equally important was the human connection. Auxiliary volunteers opened their homes to Coast Guard members with farewell picnics, holiday meals, and family celebrations, creating a sense of home for service members stationed far from their own.

Education remained a life-saving priority. Through targeted educational outreach, Flotilla 91 equipped more than 739 mariners with the foundational skills necessary for safe vessel operation, emphasizing preparedness and incident prevention. The popular *Suddenly in Command* seminar was delivered at marinas, yacht clubs, and the Lee County Sheriff's community outreach center throughout Lee County.

After two decades, the greatest beneficiary of this service is the Fort Myers Beach community itself—made safer by thousands of volunteer hours dedicated to maritime readiness, public education, and lifesaving operations.

As the Flotilla celebrates 20 years at Station Fort Myers Beach, the legacy reflects a vision realized—and surpassed. Few would doubt that Chief Warrant Officer Pete Louzao can look back with pride at what these volunteers have accomplished in service to the Coast Guard and the community they protect.

30

Editorial Note:

About the author.

Daniel Eaton is a respected leader and long-serving champion of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, with more than two decades of dedicated service since 2003. A founding member of Flotilla 91, Eaton played a key role in building a strong volunteer force focused on recreational boating safety and maritime security. He has served in critical leadership roles, including Public Affairs Staff Officer, Vice Flotilla Commander, and Flotilla Commander.

His service has been recognized with numerous honors, including multiple Auxiliary Membership, Operations, Sustained Service, and Public Education Awards, as well as the Auxiliary Operational Excellence Award. Additional recognition includes Coast Guard Unit Commendations, a Presidential Unit Citation, Commandant's Letters of Commendation, and several Meritorious Team Commendations.

A qualified Coast Guard Duty Watchstander, Harbor Safety Specialist, and Public Education Instructor, Eaton has received regional media coverage for his leadership in the America's

Waterway Watch Program and the Fit-Float Campaign. He currently serves as Public Affairs Officer, continuing to exemplify the professionalism, expertise, and commitment that define Team Coast Guard.