

Coast Guard presents highest honor

Smith Point Sea Rescue receives Distinguished Public Service Award

By Steven M. Waterfield

On Monday, April 2, Rear Admiral Meredith Austin, Commander of the Fifth Coast Guard District, presented President Andy Kauders, and past and present members of Smith Point Sea Rescue, the Distinguished Public Service Award. It is the highest honor that a civilian organization can receive from the Coast Guard.

Captain Rick Wester opened the presentation by introducing Admiral Austin to the group attending the presentation.

Wester stated in a formal presentation, "The Distinguished Public Service Award is presented to Smith Point Sea Rescue. The Commandant of the United States Coast Guard takes great pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Public Service Award for recognition of their outstanding all volunteer support of mariner safety in the mid-Chesapeake Bay region from December 1973 to December



L to R: USCG Captain Rick Wester, SPSR Vice President Jim Bullard, SPSR President Andy Kauders, USCG Rear Admiral Meredith Austin, SPSR Senior Boat Captain Buddy Silvia and USCG Senior Chief Brian Martin.

2017. Demonstrating superb readiness, they maintained a highly proficient 24 hours a day rapid response capability. Their vigilant crews and well-equipped response boats have conducted over 2,500 missions. Often at night and in foul weather, they have saved or assisted hundreds of mariners through out their 44-year

history. On the evening of 20 October 1978, while underway for a training cruise with a crew of twenty-nine, the Coast Guard Cutter Cuyahoga collided with a motor vessel Santa Cruz and sank within two minutes.

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"Smith Point Sea Rescue quickly deployed motor vessels Marshall Jean Sea Wahoo, Captain George and C. J. to the nearby scene to assist in the safe recovery of 18 Coast guardsman survivors from the water and to assist in wreckage recovery."

More recently in 2017, Smith Point Sea Rescue had more than 60 cases including one on 19 November when the crew of motor vessel Rescue One, saved the life of a severely hypothermic and disorientated mariner, who was rescued from 47-degree water as he was clutching a fixed aid navigation one thousand yards offshore without wearing a life jacket.

In addition to directly assisting mariners in distress, Smith Point Sea Rescue has also performed searches for overdue boats and persons in the water, flare sightings, recovery of abandoned vessels, towing and de-watering services, transportation of emergency medical services providers to vessels and medical evacuation from merchant ships transiting in the nearby shipping channel. These operations occur in the remote area at the extreme ends of both Coast Guard sector Maryland National Capital Region and Sector Hampton Roads and play a vital role in the rapid response capability in an area far from Coast Guard Stations, State and local response agencies and commercial assistance providers.

"Shoreside, Smith Point Sea Rescue is very active in the local community furthering embodying their spirit of service.

Smith's Point Sea Rescue's dedication, professionalism and unwavering support of the maritime community is most heartedly commended and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard," Wester concluded.

Smith Point Sea Rescue has two locations ready to respond in the lower Potomac and Chesapeake Bay area and one team North of the Yeocomico River and Potomac River area.

Smith Point Sea Rescue is in their 45th year of operation and has seen their organization grow to over 45 volunteer members who agree to be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Smith Point Sea Rescue receives no government funding and the organization has no paid staff. All expenses, including boat maintenance and fuel, are covered by donations from citizens and local organizations.

Also on hand for the presentation was Senior Chief Brian Martin, Officer in Charge of the station at Milford Haven.

Rear Admiral Meredith Austin stated that this award was long overdue for the volunteer organization and had nothing but praise for the members Smith Point Sea Rescue. "When you look at the areas we have to cover and the area Milford Haven has to cover, there's just no way we could do it alone," Austin said. "The fact that we have Smith Point Sea Rescue up here helps Captain Wester sleep at night and it helps me sleep at night," Austin said.