



U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary **Public Affairs**



First Quarter 2007 Game Plan for Public Affairs Officers

By: Ed Sweeney DC-A

For most of the country, the boating season is over and done with until next spring. Most people look forward to the next few weeks of holiday celebrations and the associated festivities, and time spent with family and friends. But if any of you are like me, I often dread the holidays. Not that I am a total scrooge, but I get very tired of the commercialism, but that is another story for some other time.

Like a kid awaiting Santa Clause, I anxiously await the end of the holiday season so I can get started on my PA program for the New Year!

What's the hurry, you say? After all, many areas won't have much boating activity until mid-April or later. Well, I say Public Affairs work is like Christmas shopping, in that there is much PA work to be done, and often there is less time to do it than we realize. Even if you are one of those people who mourn the passage of the holiday season, hopefully this message will convince you that there is still no time like the present to get a grip on what needs to be done to get your Public Affairs program off to a fast start for 2007.

TIS THE SEASON - FOR BOAT SHOWS...

While on the water activity in many areas have slowed to a crawl, chances are that boat shows are coming to your area sometime in the next couple of months. Here are some ideas to help you maximize your exposure at the boat shows:

- A good place to start preparing for boat shows is by reading or re-reading the PA Department's **Guide to Watchstanding at Boat Shows**, available at the following link: <http://www.auxadept.org/downloads/BoatShows.pdf> . This is a must reading for new FSOs-PA or anyone who has not stood watch at a boat show before. Also be sure to check out other training resources for Boat Show Exhibits located at <http://www.auxadept.org/training/exhibits.htm> .
- Make sure we have an exhibit at as many boat shows as possible. Check out www.boatshows.com/ and www.discoverboating.com/. While these do not have every boat show in the world listed, they have a majority of them. If the show wants to charge you for an exhibit space, you can contact the organizer and offer to perform demonstrations on knot tying, the Sea Partners program, give an abbreviated class using our BS&S PowerPoint's, etc. Boat Shows are a great place to actually sign up students for our PE classes.
- Stock up on supplies: Now is the time to make sure to order ample amounts of materials via your FSO-MA, BoatUS, insurance companies, State, etc. Staples should include things like federal regulations, the You're In Command materials, Waterway Watch brochures and decals, and **Join the Auxiliary** brochures. But don't forget unique items, such as the Adventures of Captain Clearwater, and Inky the Whale, available from the ANSC. Anything for the kids that can help spread the boating safety message is invaluable.

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- Coordinate with other local flotillas and other agencies (Sheriff, USPS, State Department of Boating, etc) that might be at the show; this way you can all bring something a little different. Also, consider inviting active duty Coast Guard units in your area, as this is a great way for the active duty and Auxiliary to get to know one another. The folks from the Sea Partners program at your local Sector Prevention Division have some great ideas on how to set up an eye catching display at boat shows. If there is a recruiting office nearby, ask them if they would like to help stand watch. If they can't make it, offer to display some of their recruiting literature and contact information.
- Be sure to have a sign-up list for your PE classes and VSCs. I find this works out better than having brochures with class dates and VSC stations for two reasons: (1) brochures cost money, and may end up never being read (like many items picked up at boat shows); and (2) with a list, you can now create a database of contacts. And, if you ask for their e-mail address, you REALLY have a cost-effective means of contacting potential customers/clients. This can represent a potential list of PE students and VSCs for the balance of the year! Even better yet, why not sign them up on the spot for your next PE class.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS

It's that time of year – to reflect on the prior year and make new resolutions for the upcoming one. For many people this may include serving their community and the country. What better way to do that than to join the USCGAUX. Work with your PS Officer to develop a recruiting game plan, and support them any way you can. Remember, recruiting, like public affairs, is everyone's responsibility! Recruiting also is important in our new National Commodore's watch words – Recruiting, Retention, and Responsibility. Don't be afraid of trying non-traditional approaches, like using Craig's List (under volunteer postings) and similar sites matching volunteers with local agencies.

IT'LL BE HERE BEFORE YOU KNOW IT...

NO, I am not talking about Christmas 2007 (although that, too, will be here before we know it); I'm talking about North American Safe Boating Campaign, (formerly NSBW) which will take place this year May 19-27, 2007. This year's slogan is "WEAR IT" to emphasize the importance of wearing a life jacket. Here are some suggestions that you can do NOW to ensure a successful National Safe Boating Week:

- Check out the National Safe Boating Council's web site at: <http://www.safeboatingcampaign.com/>. Click on the NSBW 2007 graphic. Specifically, check out the links **under CAMPAIGN RESOURCES** labeled **Media Guide**, and **PRESSROOM**. There are lot of graphics and audio and video PSAs available to help get the message out. There are also some ready-made press releases on topics such as **How to Test Your PFD**, **Boating Accident Statistics**, **Help in Choosing a Kid's Life Jacket**, etc.
- Form a committee to plan out events during NSBW. Two (or more) heads are often better than one. No idea what to do? Don't reinvent the wheel, try some of these ideas:
 - Partner with a local Marine Dealer, and schedule a FREE PFD Check-Up during NSBW. Believe me, in my District (11NR), we've done this last few years with the CA Department of Boating and Waterways, and it continues to be a BIG hit! Using this program, have our Vessel Examiners check out the serviceability of PFDs, and either ask the Marine Dealer to have a fixed number of PFDs available for a trade-in, or offer discount coupons on the purchase of new PFDs inside the store.
 - Coordinate with local law enforcement and fire/rescue agencies to set up a VSC Station. Be sure to invite all the local media, and have them walk through a VSC on one

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of the law enforcement or fire rescue boats. This is ideally done before NSBW to show the public that it is a painless process. Be sure to be ready to announce a schedule of VSC stations that will be available during week.

- If there is an AIR STA in your AOR, consider coordinating with them to perform a rescue demo during your celebration. Of course, be sure to invite the media, and if authorized by your DIRAUX, get them out on Auxiliary vessels so they can get "up close and personal" for the story. If possible, try to put a "local angle" on the story, highlighting local area danger spots or recent tragedies.
- Consider either a Children's Essay Contest or Children's Art Contest, with prizes (ideally children's PFDs) donated from a local Marine Dealer. Announce the winners of the contest on a Sunday or a Monday as these are the slowest news days, and this will hopefully garner more press coverage.
- Consider having a Press Conference on Saturday, 19 May 2007, to kick off the event. Ask your DIRAUX or other local active duty Dignitary to speak, as well as the state or local law enforcement and/or rescue officials. Be sure to invite all the media, including the local newspapers. They love events like this as it helps makes them look more worldly. The best time for a press conference is late morning - 1000-1100. REMEMBER: It is best to follow up with a phone call to the assignment editor the morning of the event.
- Local and state governments can and will issue a proclamation designating the week you hold your event to be North American Safe Boating Campaign Week. They need some lead-time so it is not too early to approach them now, or right after the first of the year.
- Lastly, be sure to post your NSBW events on the events calendar located at <http://www.safeboatingcampaign.com/events/events.htm>

I cannot overemphasize that the time to plan for these events is NOW. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE FIRST OF APRIL OR MAY, or you'll regret it. The sheer stress of last minute-I-tis will kill you!

INVEST IN YOURSELF

What else can you do to pass the time during the dreary winter months? Why not invest in yourself, and enhance your public affairs skills. Begin by registering for our online training programs by visiting <http://www.auxadept.org/training/courses.htm> . And check out our Public Affairs Advancement and Recognition Program (see <http://www.auxpa.org/parecog.html>) and find out how you can earn the new public affairs ribbon. Also, we will be holding three AUX-12 "C" schools in 2007. To register, follow the directions found at <http://www.auxpa.org/aux12/> .

YOU AREN'T DONE YET

And just when you thought you were done. The beginning of the year is the prime time for two other areas: (1) getting students for PE classes; and (2) assisting in getting the word out about AIM . While these areas are not the primary responsibility of PA officers, you should offer to assist the FSO-PE and the Academy Partners in promoting these programs. Here are some ideas that work for these two programs:

- Use the internet and local newspapers. My experience is that, in addition to personal contact at boat shows, the majority of PE students come from either ads in local papers or from classes posted on the internet. If the FSO-PE has not done so, offer to post the information on upcoming PE classes on the internet. Make sure you hit the BoatUS course line, as well as the Auxiliary web sites
- Help the program managers (FSO-PE) make flyers about their upcoming classes, or information sessions. Work with your RBS PVs to distribute flyers to your local Marine Dealers. Flyers about the AIM programs can be handed out at local high school sporting

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events (with their permission - of course), or even better yet, help the Coast Guard Academy Partners in your area to help staff an information exhibit at the event, and offer boating safety literature as well.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU...

The Public Affairs department staff is available to assist you with ideas for your PA programs. And be sure to check out our web site www.auxpa.org. It has many tools to help make your job easier. Moreover, the website now has a mechanism to help tell the world about your accomplishments. Visit <http://www.auxpa.org/dept/story.php>, and fill out the online form to send us information on stories you think may be of interest to the media. **This form is available to anyone interested in public affairs who wants to help us tell the Auxiliary story– you do not have to be a public affairs officer to use this form.**

Take advantage of the resources available on our site, and also be sure to utilize the External Communications Department to help contact the media with your newsworthy deeds and accomplishments. Stay in touch with happenings from the national PA Department by subscribing to our auxpao mailing list at <http://list.auxpa.org/mailman/listinfo/auxpao>. **This list is available to anyone interested in public affairs – you do not have to be a public affairs officer to subscribe.**

Hopefully this message has given you fertile food for thought, so that you can give your PA program a jumpstart in 2007. It is not meant to be all inclusive, and it is not an “order” of any kind; rather, I hope that it will provide you with some points to ponder over the holiday season. If nothing else, I hope that it makes you realize the fact that the PA Officer's job is intertwined into the fabric of virtually every Auxiliary program.

Also, please, please remember – **PUBLIC AFFAIRS IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS**, so get your elected officers, and other members of your flotilla involved! Personally, I find that exciting, and even though we've accomplished much in the past two years, I think that our best days in Public Affairs are yet to come! STAY TUNED!!!

Whishing you Happy Holidays and a successful New year!

Sincerely,



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Chief - Department of Public Affairs

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Department of Homeland Security