

Public Affairs

“Why Even Worry About It?”

By John C. Stockwell DSO/PA-PB 9ER (1/1/06)

The US Coast Guard Auxiliary...Americas Volunteer Lifesavers...Team Coast Guard...as one very high ranking Gold Side Officer in District 9 puts it, “Shipmates!”

No-one doubts these descriptions of what we are, but maybe more importantly, we need to review what it is we do!

Most certainly we are here to educate the boating and fishing public through the various facets that are a part of the “Recreational Boating Safety” (RBS) Program. We are here to lend a hand when a boater or fisherman, or anyone on or near the water finds themselves in distress. Enhancing public awareness of security concerns thru Marine Domain Awareness (MDA) is now a couple of years old and should be no stranger to anyone in the Auxiliary.

So WHY should any emphasis be placed on Public Affairs? WHY should each and every Division/Flotilla be striving to attain a maximum amount of public awareness of who we are and what we do?

The answer to the question WHY is probably going to surprise you. MONEY!

So now you’re laughing (or at least smiling) and saying this guy must be nuts!

Oh Contraire! Take a look at one of our primary functions as the Coast Guard Auxiliary. We are to support the US Coast Guard in any way we can in just about every area, except military and law enforcement activity.

You say, yeah we do that! So where does money fit into this? The answer again will likely surprise you. That answer is BUDGETTING!

That’s right, every year the US Coast Guard has got to go to Congress and ask for funds to support everything they do.

How much they receive depends largely on the amount of support they are able to enlist from the members of Congress, all of whom eventually vote on an annual budget that encompasses all the wants and needs of every agency that is apart of the Federal structure (with the possible exception of the US Post Office that is).

Let me ask a question. Do you know who lives and works near your Division/Flotilla? Who it is that has a family, friends, relatives, associates, staff members with the same group around them? Who it is that picks-up the newspaper every day, watches local TV/Cable news and listens to news radio?

Every time you stage a coup by getting something into the news, that Congressional Leader learns about it and you can bet that info is stored somewhere in the back of his/her mind when he/she is asked to vote upon a federal budget.

And don’t forget, that Congressional Leader has a fair number of people around him, including staff, who have his/her ear and often are asked to provide information and suggestions on specific issues.

It’s the same thing we do basically with AuxData. We provide real numbers through the paperwork we file for the things we do, that can be used by the Coast Guard during budget hearing time



A congressional hearing underway in Washington, DC.

When we successfully launch a Public Affairs Campaign, on an annual basis, that reaches many, many, time and time again over a year, we are in essence helping the gold side secure the funds they need to get their jobs done. It doesn’t hurt to have the people who cast the votes on the budget know what the Coast Guard is and what it does.

In other words, and I can’t stress this enough, **YOU NEVER KNOW WHO IS WATCHING AND/OR LISTENING!**

So what could this mean for us here on the local level? It might mean an additional staff member for a CG Unit. It could mean better, newer, more reliable equipment for them to do their jobs safely, and that includes PPE and EPIRB’s for us.

Sure, PA educates and in the process probably saves a life or two during a season when a boater or fisherman stops and thinks before doing something foolish after having read a story about it in the newspaper. And, of course we advertise and market where a boater or fisherman can take a class or have a VE done.

But always keep this in mind as to WHY PA is so important. The answer, “It supports the United States Coast Guard!”