

State's oldest Coast Guard Auxiliary flotilla gets ready for Safe Boating Week

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photos courtesy Coast Guard Auxiliary

Bob Babezki, a Glassboro resident and vice commander of the Flotilla 81, spoke about an event during National Safe Boating week in which the auxiliary members inspect vessels for boaters.



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by [Madelaine Vitale](#)

OCEAN CITY— David Wilson wants boaters to know that members of Flotilla 81 of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary are on the waters patrolling and promoting

boating safety.

“We want to let folks know who we are. We have visibility. We are a uniformed service. The difference is in authority,” Wilson said recently about the importance of what they do.

He was also emphasizing the importance of National Safe Boating Week, which is designed to raise awareness among the boating public about safety on the water.

Wilson, 75, the commander of the Ocean City Flotilla and its members, has been a member of the auxiliary for 15 years.

“We are more of a safety patrol,” he said. “We want to make sure people are wearing life jackets, people have safe speeds. We are there to render assistance. We offer support until the commercial towing people can arrive on the scene. We have the ability to patrol. If

someone has commercial insurance, we don't get in the way," Wilson said.

They also have the right to decline an assignment if the risk exceeds their capability.

The local auxiliary flotilla is the oldest in the state with a 75th anniversary coming up on June 1. While it does not have military or law enforcement power, its mission is vital nonetheless – especially to the safety of boaters in area waterways. It is the uniformed, volunteer arm of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Flotilla 81 operates around Ocean City, including Great Egg Harbor Bay and nearby waters. Its role is to assist the missions of the Coast Guard through vessel safety inspections, education, safety patrols, and assisting the Coast Guard in search and rescue, maritime security and environmental protection responsibilities, according to the U.S. Coast Guard website.

Wilson said the mission may be volunteer, but there is nothing easy about it.

"We are a uniform volunteer service. But we operate from the Coast Guard. We use personal boats, but they are all inspected by the Coast Guard – the same as if it were a Coast Guard vessel," he explained.

"We personally are fully covered from the time we leave the house until the time we come back to the house for any kind of liability. Most people don't understand. This isn't a social club."

Once members get underway they call in to the Coast Guard station. When they leave the Ocean City area they are under the control of Station Atlantic City, Wilson said.

Bob Babezki, 59, the vice commander of Flotilla 81 who is in charge of public affairs, said the auxiliary and auxiliaries in the Greater Philadelphia area, opted to celebrate National Safe Boating Week May 23-31, a week later than the official date.

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 30, members from Flotilla 81 will be at All-Seasons Marina, 551 Roosevelt Blvd. in Marmora, to check vessels.

Babezki, a nine-year auxiliary member and Glassboro resident, said members will make sure vessels have all of the federal and mandated safety equipment and check for recalls.

Once a vessel passes the auxiliary inspection, it will receive a sticker. It is a free service courtesy of the auxiliary.

You do not need to have served in the Coast Guard to join the auxiliary. Membership is open to United States citizens at least 17 years old, with no criminal background.

Anyone interested in joining the Ocean City flotilla may call 609-399-4299 or attend one of the monthly meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. in St. Peters Methodist Church, Eighth Street and Central Avenue in Ocean City.

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