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U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

From Rescued to Recruiter

Flotilla 12-3 Lake Murray, SC, paid special tribute to C. Russell Jernigan for 40 years of service in the U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary at the flotilla Change of Watch ceremony on December 1, 2014 in Chapin, SC. Flotilla Commander Festus Burchfield presented Jernigan with a framed Auxiliary Member Service Award signed by Rear Admiral John H. Korn, U. S. Coast Guard Seventh District. Burchfield also thanked Jernigan's wife Janice for supporting him and the Coast Guard Auxiliary during his long term of service.



Jernigan attributes his 40 year career in the Auxiliary to a boating incident that left him and his wife (fiancée at the time) stranded on a mud bar outside of Charleston harbor in the summer of 1973. It was late afternoon and he tried everything he could think of to get his boat off the mud bar and into deeper water with no success. He even tried flagging down boaters in the distance.

As night approached and darkness set in, Jernigan proclaimed that it looked like the only thing that would help them was intervention from above. Soon after, the undeniable rotary wing sound of "whoop-whoop-whoop" got louder and louder in their direction. Intervention did indeed come from above - in the form of a Coast Guard helicopter to the rescue! Jernigan and his fiancée were hoisted up into the helicopter by the choppers cable and basket system. Apparently the Governor of South Carolina was on a boat that afternoon and happened to notice Jernigan's stranded boat, contacted the Coast Guard and set a rescue into motion.

As if that wasn't enough, the Coast Guard Auxiliary retrieved Jernigan's boat off the mud bar the next day and towed it to a nearby launch for him. Jernigan was impressed with the community service and kindness offered to the everyday recreational boater. The next year he joined Flotilla 12-8 Charleston and became "that guy" himself as boat crew member assisting the public, long before commercial towing and recovery services were widely available. Later he became an instructor, teaching boating safety classes and public education courses. With job relocation, he transferred to Flotilla 12-3 Lake Murray in 1980.

Jernigan held many leadership positions, including two terms at Division 12 Captain, but professes that his favorite and most enjoyable job was Personnel, now known as Human Resources. He enjoyed getting to know the people, recruiting them into the Coast Guard Auxiliary and helping them find a position that was personally rewarding for their volunteer time and talent. It's a big move from rescued to recruiter.

Retired as Assistant Vice President with the South Carolina Farm Bureau Insurance Companies in 2006, Jernigan enjoys living on the lake and touring with his pontoon. As an active member for Flotilla 12-3, he continues to offer his knowledge, assistance and a helping hand to the flotilla wherever he can.