



COAST GUARD NATIONAL RETIREE COUNCIL

“Coast Guard For’er”

Co-chairs
RADM Fred L. Ames, USCG Retired
MCPOCG Vincent W. Patton, USCG, Retired

23 May 2008

To: Commandant (G-C)

Via: Assistant Commandant for Human Resources (CG-1)

Subj: 2008 NATIONAL RETIREE COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

1. Background

- a. The Commandant of the Coast Guard National Retiree Council (CCGNRC) held its seventh annual meeting in accordance with COMDTINST 1800.5E from 29 April through 1 May 2008 at Coast Guard Headquarters (Jemal Building). In addition to the Co-Chairs, eleven (11) of the twelve (12) chartered regional Coast Guard Retiree Councils attended plus Civilian, Annuitant and Retiree Council-at-Large representatives. Attendees are listed in the agenda, enclosure (1).
- b. The Co-Chairs could not attend the other Services’ Retiree Councils due to previously scheduled engagements. However, liaison is maintained and copies of the meeting reports are shared. This year in March, the Secretary of the Navy sponsored a joint service retiree council meeting to share agendas, procedures and topics. We were represented by Mr. Kolen Jarvis, CG-1222 and CDR Bruce Russell who reported as to the comparisons of recommendations between us, Navy/Marine Corps and Air Force. In general, the other Departments get into specific legislative initiatives, while we remain focused on communication, connection and assistance to our retiree community and how retirees can bring value to the active/reserve/civilian force.
- c. The Council had an ambitious agenda of briefings and discussions from staffs and organizations both within and external to the Coast Guard. In lieu of recounting the wide range of superb information passed on to the Council, this report focuses on those issues of potential importance to the Commandant and the Assistant Commandant for Human Resources.
- d. The Council was again distinctly honored to be personally briefed by the Commandant on his modernization strategy and initiatives to provide enhanced mission performance. Admiral Allen discussed his new relationship with the Administration now that the Service is in the Department of Homeland Security, as well as frank insights on issues with the current House Authorization Bill.
- e. The Council notes the continued exceptional support provided by the Military Coalition/National Military and Veterans Alliance, and especially the Military Officer Association of America (MOAA) and the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) for this year’s meeting. Besides the highly informative briefings, MOAA again sponsored a lunch for the Council in the Commandant’s Flag Mess and FRA held a reception for the Council at their Headquarters. The Council would like to thank both VADM Vivian Crea and VADM (Sel.) Cliff Pearson for joining us at the MOAA lunch. The Council greatly appreciates the continued support of

Delta Dental in providing a comprehensive briefing as well as hosting our “welcome aboard” reception on Tuesday evening.

2. Issues

- a. **Armed Forces Retirement Home.** The Council received a detailed and most informative brief from Ms. Shelia Abarr, Public Affairs Officer. She described their heartwarming response to Hurricane Katrina to ensure the safety and well-being of all residents of the Gulfport facility, and continued management of those displaced from the Gulf while that facility is being rebuilt. We also note the major improvements and forward-looking master plans for both the Washington and Gulfport facilities. The Coast Guard’s inclusion in the Armed Forces Retirement Home is in the current authorization bill. If passed, our enlisted men and women can be justly proud that they support such a noble institution, and thereby ensuring availability for retired Coasties.
- b. **Benefits.** The Council notes the continuing progress by the Military Coalition, working with the Administration and Congress, in obtaining important benefits for active duty and reserve members, the retiree community, and their families. The Council continues to support those legislative initiatives that honor the men and women who serve everyday in harms way. Especially with the recruiting and retention challenges across all active duty, Reserve and National Guard components, the Nation must keep faith with the relatively small numbers of service members who bear the majority of the responsibility for the protection of our liberties. Although our Nation is at war, only 1% of Americans are actually engaged. While recruiting is going well for the Coast Guard, the other Service’s have considerable challenges that are not likely to get better in the near future. Keeping faith with this critical population will be one of the important keys to maintaining the all-volunteer force. We remained concerned with the message being sent by proposed increases in TRICARE enrollment fees and pharmacy co-pays. While the Council recognizes that changes may be necessary, given the substantial rise in healthcare costs and that enrollment fees haven’t changed since inception years ago, we recommend that any changes be carefully vetted with thoughtful consideration of the long-term effects on the force.
- c. **Healthcare.**
 - i. The Council continues to note the tremendous strides made by TRICARE and associated enhanced benefits, such as TRICARE for Life (TFL) and the expanded pharmacy benefit.
 - ii. The TRICARE website, www.tricare.osd.mil, is an exceptional healthcare information/access tool. Additionally, all Coast Guard members, especially retirees, should make note of the Coast Guard’s toll-free health benefits advisor number, 1-800-9HBAHBA. All too often members are attempting to tackle complex issues on their own when expert help is readily available. As the Service goes through its realignment of support services delivery, the Council hopes that adequate provision is made to continue a robust health benefits advisor hotline.
 - iii. TRICARE Retire Dental Program. See www.trdp.org. Some important items to note:

CCGNRC Report 2008

1. Delta Dental does not have a connection with DEERS; changes to DEERS status, such as dependents, must be transmitted to Delta Dental too.
 2. This program is immediately available to “grey area” reserves.
 3. There is no waiting period if the member signs up within 120 days after retirement.
 4. Preventative maintenance is the key to ensuring oral health—this program provides that foundation.
 5. Delta Dental received the new contract and there will be no premium increase for the first year of the contract that begins 1 October 2008.
- d. **CGHQ’s National Retiree Help Desk (NRHD).** This is a real win for our retirees and their dependents world-wide and is truly an exceptional example of Coasties helping their own.
- i. CAPT Bob Warakomsky provided a detailed brief as a follow-up from last year, including inquiry and response statistics. More than 600 inquiries have been handled since standup in July 2006 with an average response time of about 30 hours (down from 48 hours reported last year). NRHD is receiving an average of 8 inquires per week and as high as 20+ in a week. Five members of the Capital Area Council have taken on this mission and perform most of the “watchstander” duties, the NRHD has been set up to do this remotely and we have three members outside of the Capital Area that do so very effectively. In fact, all watchstanders do so remotely from their home or office. We also have four “pushers” employed at CGHQ’s with CG email accounts who daily forward the incoming emails to the remote watchstanders. Watchstanders call into the voice hotline and access voice inquiries during their duty.
 - ii. Members of the Council were again tasked with soliciting volunteers to stand the watch from wherever they may live. This year’s status report and operative information is included as enclosure (2). The Council sincerely appreciates the continued support provided by the Headquarters Support Command to maintain this capability—their support has played a major role in the success of the program.
- e. **Continuing Service – Coast Guard For’er.** CAPT Bob Skewes, USCG (Ret.), Chief, Office of Work-Life discussed his program’s shortfall in billets and dollars and the role retiree volunteers can play in filling that gap. In particular, they could use assistance in supporting Work-Life field offices for outreach/awareness/marketing, ombudsman, training (subject matter experts), transition/relocation program, health promotion, decedent affairs, financial counseling, elder care, and administrative support. We again recommend that regional retiree councils work with the Work-Life Program supervisors in the field to understand local needs and match qualified/interested volunteers. Retirees participating in TAPS workshops, to serve on panels or to talk about life after the Coast Guard, are important roles in helping members transition. The Council continues to recommend that particular attention be paid to the Work-Life Program during the mission support modernization to ensure that it retains the necessary capacity to fulfill its mission.

- a. **Civilian Retiree Identification Card.** CWO Shirley Tennyson, CG-1222, briefed us on the status of the civilian retiree ID card that will enable access to Coast Guard MWR facilities. This project is moving ahead within the Department of Defense (DoD). Now that DoD is driving this initiative, the new card will be produced by ID card software upgrade (expect summer to November rollout to Coast Guard sites). However, for individuals to be eligible for the ID card, the Defense Data Manpower Center (DMDC) must have a record that they are a civilian Coast Guard retiree. Discussion with the Chief, Office of Civilian Personnel for the Coast Guard indicates there are a number of complex issues that now must be addressed. These are not only Coast Guard issues, but DoD-wide too.
 - i. The DMDC database drives the issuance of the cards. Because the Coast Guard has recently transitioned to the new Combined Access Card (CAC), DMDC will have them in their database and their information will be available upon retirement.
 - ii. For those retired before issuance of the new cards (everyone 1-2 years ago and earlier), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) holds their information (not the Coast Guard). Appears some sort of request on a case-by-case basis might be necessary to initiate a transfer of information from OPM to DMDC. It is not clear that a batch dump would be either feasible or warranted.
 - iii. Still pending is the definition of a CG civilian retiree. As civilian retirees get a “general” annuity from the federal government that is not agency related, but rather the total accumulation of federal service, it is not clear as to what defines a CG civilian retiree (i.e., any service with the CG? 5 years? 10 years? 20 years? Only those who were employed by the Coast Guard when they retired?). Any definition other than just those who retired as Coast Guard employees will add additional complexity. Coast Guard civilian personnel should confer with their DoD service counterparts and promulgate this definition; this action along with determining how information will get from OPM to DMDC needs to be done soonest so issuance can proceed when the software is in place.
 - iv. Also noted that DoD is still weighing expiration date options (it will not be indefinite).
- b. **Coast Guard Mutual Assistance.** CWO Barry Boisvere, USCG (Ret.), Executive Director, briefed on CGMA operations and needs. CGMA continues to be the very best way retirees can support today’s Coasties and are encouraged to do so via allotments from their retired pay. In fact, the retiree community is the only group that gives more than it receives. From 2003 through 2007, retired members contributed more than \$1.64M and received \$1.17M in loans and grants.
- c. **Personnel Services Center (PSC).** Ms. Debbie Farley, Chief, Retiree and Annuitant Services (RAS) Branch attended and briefed. The Council continued to note the superb support provided by her Branch to all retirees and the regional councils. With nearly half of the helpdesk inquiries requiring referral to RAS for answer/resolution, Ms Farley and her folks are a tremendous asset to that initiative.

- i. The retiree records and pay system was the first to move to “Global Pay” effective 1 May, as part of the service-wide move to a web-enabled pay and personnel records system—the Coast Guard state-of-the-art personnel system called “Direct Access.” Retirees will be able to make a number of on-line changes to their profiles that will make life easier for both our members and PSC staff. This self-service feature is projected to be available about 1 January 2009 and will include such things as mailing address, phone number, allotments/bonds, and banking information. RAS April 2008 statements have the Employee Identification Number (EMPLID) that will be used in place of the SSN when accessing the system. That statement also reflects adjustments in the way income tax withholdings are calculated and all retirees should pay attention to the changes from their last statement and adjust their federal withholdings as/if necessary. In particular:
 1. Former Spouse Protection Act (FSPA). With the new Global Pay System, the FSPA deduction will reduce the taxable gross before the Federal Income Tax Withheld (FITW) is applied. This reduction in taxable gross will decrease the FITW withheld.
 2. A retiree entitled to multiple payments will have those payments taxed on a single federal withholding. For those that are a retired reservist and an annuitant, the payments are combined and taxed once.
- ii. As a repeat from the last two year’s reports, the Council suggests that a more appropriate name be given to the retiree newsletter “Evening Colors” as most retirees feel they are just beginning their next phase in life (most work for some time period). Fred’s Place put this out for feedback and the majority responding indicated if it was to be changed, they suggested simply calling it “The Coast Guard Retirees’ Newsletter.” The Council unanimously concurs and respectfully asks that CG-1 address this recommendation.

3. Increasing the Number and Size of Regional Councils.

- a. As noted last meeting, while there has been some growth in the number of regional councils with the latest start-up in Hawaii, there are numerous areas of the U.S. with a good retiree population and proximate Coast Guard units with no regional councils. We again discussed the need to reach out to retirees in those areas to encourage and help them establish or reestablish councils. A “one-pager” guide on how to establish and charter a council was developed last year and is posted on the Fred’s Place area of the Commandant’s National Retiree Council. It is linked from the Coast Guard website under “Our People,” “Retiree Affairs.”
- b. We held follow up discussion from the last meeting on the question: “Now that I have the council chartered, how do you encourage participation?” The Council members understand that getting folks together to swap sea stories just won’t cut it today. Rather, each council must develop a menu of meaningful activities for its members. Viable councils are those that are activity-based where the members can “make a difference.” Volunteering to assist the Work-Life program, staffing a retiree’s office at the local Coast Guard unit, assisting the local command with decedent affairs, and NRHD watchstanding are areas where we can make a

difference and will attract member involvement. Council activities must be driven by the desires and talents, skills and abilities of its members.

4. New Initiatives. As noted in the background section, our Council is focused on communication, connection and assistance to our retiree community and how retirees can bring value to the active/reserve/civilian force. These two new initiatives reflect that commitment.
 - a. CAPT Dana Starkweather, Co-Chair of the Pacific Northwest Council, announced their initiative to provide decedent affairs officers for the 13th Coast Guard District. This is a much needed duty that requires time and expertise not normally readily available as a collateral duty. Dana will give us a “how goes it” next year.
 - b. CDR Bruce Russell of the Capital Area Council is leading an effort of his council to develop a Caregivers’ Guide. While PSC has a very useful Survivor Benefits Guide, there is no single source of critical entitlement information for caregivers of aging Coast Guard retirees, dependents, and annuitants. This will be more and more important as retirees are tending to live longer. The proposed Caregivers Guide would be limited to retiree entitlements and link to those services provided by veterans and mutual organizations. It is targeted to children, social workers and others who are supporting the retiree, annuitant, and/or dependent. The intention is to keep it simple and easily sustainable by linking to the information rather than reprinting, follow the format of the Survivors Benefits Guide and limiting it to eight pages. Once it is developed, we’ll likely request that PSC post and maintain.
5. Summary.
 - a. This was the fifth annual meeting of the Council. The CCGNRC program continues to mature with a cadre of highly dedicated retirees. As Council Co-Chairs for the last number of years, we’ve seen the Council progress and grow in ways that are building nicely on the objectives set forth in the guiding Commandant Instruction. Members come ready to participate in ways to improve connections to the retiree community and “make a difference” for all of our Service’s men and women, active duty and retired, reserve, civilian and Auxiliary.
 - b. We again note significant value is being provided to those Coast Guard units and surrounding retiree communities where there is “enlightened leadership” at the commands. Retirees who are willing to volunteer their time, skills, knowledge and expertise to the Coast Guard community leverage the commands’ workforce. Those supportive commanders and commanding officers truly understand that for a minor investment in space, resources, and time, and a good dose of respect, pays substantial dividends. The Council salutes their insight and will continue to encourage others to step forward.

CCGNRC Report 2008

- c. Special recognition is once again made of our Council Coordinator, Mr. Jarvis Kolen (CG-1222). He expertly handled all facets of meeting planning and logistics. However, we are truly saddened that he departed during this meeting for a new position that will enable him to attend to family needs. We could not have asked for a better individual at the helm and he certainly facilitated the work of the Co-Chairs these last few years. He will be missed and the Council provided special recognition of his contributions with a Certificate of Appreciation and a present. Notably his supervisor, Mr. Clifford Samuel, readily stepped in and continued exceptional support throughout the meeting. BZ!



Fred L. Ames



Vincent W. Patton

Enclosures:

- (1) CCGNRC 2008 Agenda
- (2) National Retirees Help Desk – May 2008

AGENDA

| |
|----------------------------|
| Monday, 28 APR 2008 |
|----------------------------|

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Activity</u> |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1500 | HOTEL CHECK-IN |

ATTENDEES

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| RADM Fred Ames | CCGNRC Co-Chair |
| MCPOCG Vince Patton | CCGNRC Co-Chair |
| CAPT Dana Starkweather | Pacific Northwest |
| CAPT W. G. "Bud" Schneeweis | Capital Area |
| CAPT Bob Warakomsky | Capital Area |
| Ms. Susan Baicar, CIV(Ret) | Capital Area |
| CDR Bruce A. Russell | Capital Area |
| SCPO Mike White | Capital Area |
| CAPT Bill Wilkins | North Coast |
| MCPO Ib Andersen | Cape May |
| MCPO Douglas Squires | Tidewater |
| SCPO Thomas Dutton | Hawaii |
| CAPT Kenneth Harrison | Greater Miami |
| CWO Edward Weiss | Jacksonville |
| MCPO Larry Foster Conley | Yorktown |
| CDR Salvador Romo, Jr | Northern California |
| CWO Fred Siegel | Council-at-Large |
| Ms. Lois Dolliver-Ensrud | Annuitant |
| Mr. Jarvis Kolen (CG-1222) | CCGNRC Liaison |

AGENDA

Tuesday, 29 APR 2008

Room 9-1419, JEMAL Building Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Activity</u> | <u>Speaker(s)</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| 0730 | Refreshments | |
| 0800 | Welcome and Introduction | Council Co-Chairs |
| 0820 | Administrative Announcements | Mr. Jarvis Kolen CCGNRC Coordinator |
| 0830 | Review 2007 Council Report | Council Co-Chairs |
| 0930 | Welcome & Update | RADM Pearson CG-1 |
| Personnel/Workforce Issues | | |
| 0945 | BREAK | |
| 1000 | Retiree Dental Program | Mr. Patrick Henry/Tom McDavid Delta Dental |
| 1200 | LUNCH | on your own; available at CGHQ |
| 1300 | Armed Forces Retirement Home | Ms. Sheila R. Abarr (PA AFRH) |
| 1400 | CGKO access for Retiree Address | Open MIC |
| 1530 | BREAK | |
| 1545 | ID Card for Retired Civilian | CWO Shirley Tennyson, CG-1222 (Conference call) |
| 1600 | Review & Preps for Next Day | Co-Chairs |
| 1630 | SECURE | |
| 1800 | Welcome Reception sponsored by Delta Dental at the Virginia Suites | |

AGENDA

| |
|-------------------------------|
| Wednesday, 30 APR 2008 |
|-------------------------------|

Room 9-1419, JEMAL Building, Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Activity</u> | <u>Speakers</u> |
|-------------|--|---|
| 0800 | Medical Update (TRICARE, TFL, TRICARE Senior Pharmacy) | RADM Robert Tedesco, USPHS (CG-11) CWO2 Rebecca Vinlove USCG |
| 0945 | BREAK | |
| 1000 | Caregivers Guide | CDR Bruce Russell, USCG, Capitol Area Council |
| 1045 | BREAK | |
| 1100 | CG Mutual Assistance Support/Outreach | CWO Boisvere, USCG, (Ret) Executive Director, CGMA CWO Ronald Wolf, USCG, (Ret) |
| 1200 | MOAA LUNCHEON (Flag Mess) | VADM Norb Ryan, USN (Ret), Pres MOAA |
| 1300 | Military Coalition & Veterans Alliance Update | Mr. John Davis (FRA) CDR Rene Campo, USN (Ret) (MOAA) |
| 1500 | BREAK | |
| 1515 | CGHQ'S Retiree's Program Helpdesk | CAPT Bob Warakomsky, USCGR (Ret.) |
| 1615 | Review & Preps for Next Day | Co-Chairs |
| 1630 | SECURE | |
| 1700 | FRA Reception for the USCG | FRA National Headquarters |

CCGNRC Report 2008

Retiree Council

AGENDA

THURSDAY, 1 May 2008

Room 9-1419, JEMAL Building Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC

| <u>Time</u> | <u>Activity</u> | <u>Speakers</u> |
|-------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 0800 | Morning discussions (Open MIC) | ALL Attendees |
| 0900 | Personnel Service Center (PSC) | Ms. Debbie Farley PSC (RAS) |
| 0945 | BREAK | |
| 1000 | Innovative Topic and Preparation to visit the Transpoint Building | Open Mic |
| 1100 | Commandant's Perspective (COMDT Briefing Room 2610) | Admiral Thad W. ALLEN (G-C) |
| 1200 | LUNCH | on your own; available at CGHQ |
| 1300 | Retiree Volunteers Support to Work-Life Program | Mr. Robert Skewes, (CG-111) |
| 1400 | Develop Topic List for Report | All Attendees |
| 1445 | BREAK | |
| 1500 | Administrative Details -- Complete travel claims -- Fill out Conference Evaluation Form -- Pack up materials for mailing home | Mr. Jarvis Kolen |
| 1530 | Closing Remarks | Co-Chairs |
| 1600 | 2008 MEETING ADJOURNED | for Regional Council Reps |
| 1615 | Review 2008 Meeting, Outline Draft Report | Co-Chairs |

National Retirees Help Desk – Update May 2008

Background:

Under the auspices of the Commandant of the Coast Guard National Retiree Council (CCGRNC) program, the **National Retiree Help Desk** serves as the United States Coast Guard Headquarters single point of contact in CG-1 to keep open a positive line of communications between the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard military retiree community in an effort to ensure the resources and capabilities of each are used to help resolve the needs of the other.

Discussion:

The National Retiree Help Desk (NRHD) has been in operation since July 2006 and is currently staffed by five members of the Capital Area Coast Guard Retiree Council and three other remote retiree volunteers. No one actually sits at the space reserved in HQs for the function. Four “pushers” who work in Coast Guard Headquarters forward the emails to whoever has the duty that week. The Help Desk organization and operational concepts were developed by CAPT Norm Lemley, Ret, CAPT Bob Warakomsky, Ret, and LCDR Dave DuPont, Ret.

The NRHD serves as a Headquarters point of contact for retirees needing assistance to determine to whom or where they should direct their inquiries. This has already proven to be a valuable communication channel between the active duty Coast Guard and the retiree community. In times of significant organizational change along with ever-changing benefits and retiree support programs, a well functioning NRHD is essential. The NRHD is not meant to curtail direct contact between retirees and the Coast Guard if the contact information is already known.

Office space has been allocated in Room 8-0234 at the Coast Guard Headquarters Jemal Building. It is equipped with a computer, e-mail, and telephone service. Retirees are able to call or email questions and concerns. As of May 2008, over 600 queries have been recorded since the last week of July 2006. The average number of queries has been about 8 per week, and the average response time is about 30 hours, down from 48 in 2007.

Contact Information:

Voicemail: 202-475-5381 or 1-866-664-6245

General E-Mail Address: NRHD@uscg.mil

Watchstanders monitor the voicemail and e-mail account and respond in an appropriate and timely manner.

CAPT Bob Warakomsky has set up the program and is the Capital Area Coast Guard Retiree Council's Coordinator. A watchstanders list of Council members has been established, but additional people are needed to help.

CCGNRC Report 2008

Watchstanding procedures, frequently asked questions (FAQs), a list of links with key programs and other resource material have been developed. Watchstanders are given a briefing on

responsibilities; primarily they answer phone and e-mail inquiries. No one is expected to be an expert on Coast Guard programs and retiree-related information (benefits, healthcare, etc.), but rather as watchstanders they assist in directing the inquirer to the right source. The FAQs file is a good information source for the watchstander. Care is being taken to minimize the duties of being a watchstander.

The concept of a remote watchstander outside of the National Capital Region has worked well, proving that watchstanders in any geographical location can perform their duties effectively.

The Watchstanding Team maintains contact with the National Retiree Council Liaison, temporarily Mr. Clifford Samuel, as a direct point of contact to interface with HQ for administrative support that may be required. He is located in an office near the Retiree Program Coordinator's Office in the Jemal Building.