

As delivered

**Admiral Thomas H. Collins**  
**RO Brooklyn Commissioning Ceremony**  
**New York**  
**30 October 2003**

Thank you, Captain Viekman, for that kind introduction and for such a warm welcome.

Recognize VIPs:

Congressman Anthony Weiner, 9<sup>th</sup> NY District

Brooklyn Borough President, Marty Markowitz

Ms. Hilda Rodger, NAACP Regional Director

Mr. Darwin Davis, President, NY Urban League

Dr. Maxine Lubner, NY College of Aeronautics (Blue 21 school)

Mr. Victor Gainor, President of the Navy League (NY)

and other distinguished guests...welcome and thank you for joining us today.

It's always good to be back in New York, but I'm especially happy to be here with you on this very special occasion, as we celebrate the future – the future of the young men and women of Brooklyn and the future of the Coast Guard.

When I became Commandant of the Coast Guard last year, I issued my Commandant's Direction, stating my priorities. They are Readiness, People, and Stewardship. "People" are listed in the middle, because they are center-stage and are the main focus of my attention. I believe everyone with any experience in leadership or management would echo my thoughts that the greatest asset any of us has is not a ship or computer or some other piece of equipment – but our people. They – are our greatest asset.

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Writing my Commandant's Direction a year ago, I stated, "Our ability to attract, develop, retain, and deploy a quality workforce is the key to the Coast Guard's future – it must be a top priority and is perhaps our greatest challenge." Later, I refined the term "a quality workforce" to mean "a diverse, highly capable, and flexible workforce". Those words were true then and they still ring true today – and I believe they will continue to ring true well into the future.

Of that list – attract, develop, retain, and deploy – the first, and the one on which all the others depend, is ATTRACT. We can't develop, retain, and deploy people if we don't first attract them to our service. And that's where this new recruiting office, and others like it, comes in.

We've been making a large investment in our efforts to attract young men and women into the Coast Guard: over the past three years, we've increased the number of recruiters in the field by 148, the number of recruiting offices by 37, and our recruiting budget by over 14 million dollars (\$14.6M). These efforts have netted us outstanding results – over the past two years, we've increased the number of people in the Coast Guard by over 3100 (3120) and we're planning on adding another 625 people to our ranks this year. Our efforts have also resulted in an increase in the numbers of minority members joining the Coast Guard. We had historically hovered around 18% of our new recruits being minority members – I'm proud to report that last year, one-quarter –or 25% -- of our new recruits were minorities and we're on track this year to meet or beat that mark.

We're also focusing our efforts by where we're locating those recruiting offices. Besides this office, we're opening new recruiting offices and in Queens, Atlanta, San Antonio, Houston, San Diego, and in the Miami area. We're focusing on these places because they're where we think we can find the right people – talented people with an

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interest in the military and the propensity to serve in the Coast Guard – and not just to serve, but also to succeed in the Coast Guard. We're looking for young men and women from all walks of life and from all backgrounds – because diversity will make us both stronger and a better organization.

By improving our recruiting efforts, we can be more selective about whom we bring into the service – and that's a win/win both for the Coast Guard and for the young men and women who join our ranks. In today's technologically advanced world, it's more important than ever to have capable, dedicated people wearing the Coast Guard uniform. We've initiated the two largest procurements in Coast Guard history, the Integrated Deepwater System and Rescue 21, both of which will require technological skills far beyond what was needed just a few years ago. These systems and the people who operate them will allow us to continue to perform our missions like search and rescue, while also performing our homeland security mission at the much higher pace required since 9-11.

You need look no farther than New York to see today's Coast Guard in action. Our people here are performing all Coast Guard missions: search and rescue, marine safety, environmental protection, drug interdiction, icebreaking, fisheries enforcement, aids to navigation, migrant interdiction, and maritime security. Since 9-11, our maritime security mission has taken on a much larger role as we protect America from those who would threaten her. And in response to that increased role, we've increased our capabilities. One example of our new capabilities is our Maritime Safety and Security Teams located throughout the country, including one right here in New York. Another is our partnering with other agencies -- the Staten Island Ferry crash and to the blackout in mid-August are examples of large, coordinated, multi-agency responses, where dozens of agencies -- local, state, and federal -- worked together to get the job done.

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There has been an increase in demand for the Coast Guard's services that will continue well into the future. This means we need to grow the Coast Guard – to bring more people in, so we can keep America safe and secure. It takes a special kind of person to join the Coast Guard – one who's dedicated to both serving our nation and to helping others – whether it's rescuing someone from a sinking ship or protecting our children from the smuggler trying to get cocaine onto our streets or ensuring that our nation's fisheries are protected from poachers. We in the Coast Guard are military, maritime, and multi-mission.

Coast Guard men and women get responsibility early on in their careers. There's nothing unusual about having a 22-year-old boat coxswain in charge of a four-million-dollar boat and a crew of three others, patrolling New York Harbor. All four of the crew have to make decisions, relying on their training, their smarts, and their fellow crewmembers to get the job done.

In her majority opinion in the University of Michigan law school case decided this past term, Justice O'Connor states "In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity." That's not just true for law school admissions, but in every setting – and especially for the Coast Guard. I know the Coast Guard is open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity. It's recruiting offices like this one that will help us get that message out not only to future Coast Guard men and women, but to everyone – that the Coast Guard is visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity. I want us to be known as an Employer of Choice and this recruiting office is a huge step moving us to that goal.

I'll wrap things up by assuring you that the Coast Guard is Semper Paratus – always ready -- 24/7, protecting our country's 95,000 miles of coast line. This new recruiting office will help keep us Semper Paratus, now and well into the future. We are America's Shield of Freedom.

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Thank you very much.