

**Admiral Thomas H. Collins
Tri-Cities Community Dinner
Ferrysburg, Michigan
Thursday, 31 July 2003**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It's my great pleasure to be here this evening among friends and family – we consider ourselves among our extended family here in the Tri-Cities Community.

My sincerest gratitude to the mayors of the Tri-Cities Community for their incredible support and their efforts in sponsoring this annual birthday party: President Dan and Patti Keller of the Village of Spring Lake; Ed and Helen Lystra of Grand Haven; and our hosts tonight, Ray and Judy Tejchma of Ferrysburg. Every year's CG Day events here are memorable, but this year is even more so, as we mark the 60th anniversary of ESCANABA's loss.

You know, this is my first Coast Guard Festival here and I've been looking forward to it for a year now. Last year, my Vice Commandant, Tom Barrett, was here and he came back really singing your praises about how to do a Coast Guard Day right, so I'm looking forward to experiencing first-hand what's known as the premier Coast Guard Birthday Celebration.

Any birthday – whether a personal one or that of an organization – gives us an opportunity to reflect on the year just past and what we've accomplished.

This past year has been as challenging and dynamic as any in Coast Guard history:

- Confronting tremendous new demands of homeland security and the Global War on Terrorism, the Coast Guard supported Operation Liberty Shield to defend America's ports, coasts, and infrastructure.
- Deployed Coast Guard forces executed Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as America's superb military and our coalition partners liberated Iraq.
- At the same time we successfully met unabated and unrelenting demands for search and rescue, marine safety, environmental protection, drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, fisheries enforcement, aids to navigation, and domestic and polar icebreaking during one of the most challenging ice seasons on record.
- We initiated the two largest procurements in Coast Guard history: the Integrated Deepwater System and Rescue 21, ensuring our continuing ability to perform at the high level the American people have come to expect.
- We led the international effort to adopt a new maritime security code and began implementing major new federal maritime legislation, the Maritime Transportation Security Act.

As delivered

- And on March 1, 2003, as part of the largest government reorganization in over 50 years, we moved smoothly from the Department of Transportation to the new Department of Homeland Security.

Key to our success in these historic events was the hard work, integrity, professionalism, and adaptability of our people; the military character of our Service; and the multi-mission capability embedded in our cutters, aircraft, boats, and systems.

Also key to our success this past year was the support and dedication of the Coast Guard extended family – folks like you, who join us here tonight to celebrate our victories, but who, more importantly, help us along the way, so we can achieve those victories. I'm talking about you who are there for our active duty, reserve, civilian, and Auxiliary Coast Guard members day-in and day-out, year-round. You might not even never know the value of your support – to the young Petty Officer who knows his wife can call their neighbor if there's a problem while he's underway or to the single mom who has a trusted babysitter to stay with her son on her duty nights – you're the ones who help us reach our goals.

Looking back on our past year and all that we have accomplished together, we have every reason to celebrate – and every reason to say “thank you” to all those who have helped us to succeed this year. As I look around the room tonight, I'm overwhelmed at the sight of so many ardent supporters of the Coast Guard.

So, with great pride, I thank all of you here for honoring the Coast Guard with such enthusiasm and devotion that you show during this annual celebration. Oh yes, and Happy 213th to the CG!