

# Citizens On Shore Watch

*U.S. Coast Guard  
Citizens Action  
Network recognized  
for serving a vital  
auxiliary role*

*By Sarah Garmire*

**D**edicated volunteers acting in partnership with the 13th U.S. Coast Guard District (USCG), headquartered in Seattle, have brought a fledgling program into the spotlight.

Bob Lyden has promoted the Citizen's Action Network (CAN) for more than six years.

"Our program recruits citizens who either live on or have views of the waterways in the 13th USCG District, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana," says Bob.

The program has more than 300 shoreline members in Puget Sound, from Olympia to British Columbia, on the Washington and Oregon Pacific coasts and a few members on the Columbia River.

"The missions may include assistance with search and rescue, flare sightings, pollution control, verifying navigational aids and reporting weather conditions," says Bob. "Eligible partners include private citizens, businesses and public agencies that have a marine view and a telephone."

Bob provides an example of one such case.

"On the morning of February 23, 2005, members of the Citizen's Action Network were called for assistance in a breaking case," he says. "Police were searching for a homeless man who had stolen a yacht and taken a woman hostage.

Upon receiving this report, the Coast Guard launched or diverted



all of its available boats and helicopters to support the sheriff's marine units already searching the region's waterways, numerous islands and nearly 1,000 miles of shoreline. CAN members were put on watch to join the search and maintained a lookout from their waterfront homes.

"Throughout the day's search, live information relayed from CAN membership allowed the Coast Guard's command center to narrow the search area and most effectively utilize the handful of assets taking part in the extensive effort."

Bob says some of the network members in the south Puget Sound region could see across narrow waterways, from

shore to shore, and acted as visual "gatekeepers" to all marine traffic. Others, with more expansive views, were able to rule out entire swaths of waterways.

All CAN information was shared with city and county law enforcement vessels. By the afternoon, the vessel was identified and CAN



*Above, from left, Coast Guard Auxiliary Detachment member Bob Lyden, Petty Officer 3rd Class Adam Eggers, Admiral Thomas Collins—commandant of the Coast Guard—and Lieutenant Commander Andre Billeaudeau meet at the 2005 Coast Guard Innovation Expo in California. The group from the 13th District public affairs office presented a program at the event. Top, Andre presents Bob with the Federal Executive Board Public Service Gold Medallion in May 2006 in Seattle.*



*Mike Dickover, left, officer in charge of the USCG Auxiliary Detachment Anderson Island, with Bob at Balch Passage, a south Puget Sound waterway.*

members were released. The suspect was arrested and the hostage was freed, unharmed.

Bob got involved as a member of the USCG Auxiliary Detachment at Anderson Island. Unit member Mike Dickover introduced him to the first USCG citizen's program, called Eyes on the Sound, later called Northwest Watch and now known as the Citizen's Action Network.

"For a program without an allocated budget, this public/private citizen program has come a long way since its inception in the late 1990s by Lieutenant Commander Andre Billeaudeau," says Bob, the USCG District 13 historian.

Billeaudeau is the district's public affairs officer.

Bob met Billeaudeau when he was volunteering at Group Seattle in 2000.

A "group" is a USCG organization level within the district. Eyes on the Sound originated as a Group Seattle program.

"I asked him if I could assist with

promoting and developing the program, because the Coast Guard had no funding and the program was just at the group level," Bob says. "Its sole exposure was a Web page with nothing but a phone number to call.

"I took over the program and decided one way to get the word out with no funding was via the USCG Auxiliary Web site. I was introduced to its Webmaster, Bruce Miller, and the program took off from there."

Billeaudeau says Bob is probably the most important asset for CAN since its inception.

"He's the heart and soul of a program," he says. "Remember, we have zero budget. For the Coast Guard to recognize a program, they are recognizing Bob. He's the outside sales guy, the media guy.

"Community relations puts the 'home' in homeland security. I wish I had a dozen of him. There are many more in this program and in the auxiliary, but he's the top."

As the CAN gains acceptance,

the program expands.

"One of the newest additions to the CAN tool bag is an instant phone alert system, which allows Coast Guard dispatchers or any of our cooperating agencies to instantaneously inform participants of important issues or breaking news," says Billeaudeau.

The CAN may soon be adopted nationally. This month, Billeaudeau will present the concept to all USCG district commanders at national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

"The Washington State Citizens Corps met with us in Seattle about recognizing our program and bringing it into their program," says Bob.

Bob and Billeaudeau also met with a representative of the National Citizen's Corps. The CAN program may be implemented nationally through that program.

In the meantime, the CAN is getting attention. Last year the team won the Department of Homeland Security's "Secretary's Award of Excellence."

Bob and Mike made a 10-minute video now shown on TVW—Washington's public television station—four or more times a week.

"Our program is in the running for the 2007 Mitretek Innovation Award presented by the Harvard School of Government," says Bob. "Winners can receive \$100,000 for their programs.

"One of my highlights was being able to meet the Coast Guard commandant and get our pictures taken with the admiral in California at the Coast Guard Innovation Expo. We recently were contacted by the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research in Boston, for the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research's Better Government Competition 2007." ■

*The Citizens Action Network Web site is [www.uscg.mil/d13/can/](http://www.uscg.mil/d13/can/). It contains information for prospective volunteers. The district Public Affairs Office can be reached at (206) 220-7237.*