

Auxiliary crew thankful for new culinary program



Ginger and Ron Ellis (on right) pose with one of the U.S. Coast Guard commanders and his wife prior to serving a reception at their home as part of the AUXCHEF program.

By Irene Luck
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Ron Ellis of Louisa is blazing a trail for other U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliarists as he achieves another first.

Last year, Ellis was the first auxiliarist to attend the Coast Guard Culinary Arts School, located on the west coast. This year, he participated in a weeklong training at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, which was approved and paid for by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Ellis, a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Lake Anna Flotilla 87, took a five-day course in appetizers and small dishes, learning about planning, preparing and serving foods typically featured at receptions.

"There were 12 in the class and we all had a variety of skills," Ellis said. "We were divided into groups of three and had to cook something different each day and eat what we'd prepared."

The groups would be assigned a different category each day, such as seafood or fruits, and devise the dishes to create and serve.

"It was quite an opportunity for me to be able to attend," he said. "And, I learned a lot and had a great time."

Ellis was accompanied by his wife, Ginger, who also enjoyed the meals which were prepared by students at the school.

The opportunities have come as Ellis has found an avenue for his culinary skills and has partnered them with his contacts in the Coast Guard.

Ellis owns and operates Ginger Hill Bed and Breakfast just outside the town of Louisa

with his wife, as well as a catering and in-home cooking business.

Last year, he created a new training for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the AUXCHEF Program, teaching volunteers how to prepare and serve food for various Coast Guard occasions.

In May, the first series of classes was held for those interested in learning more about how to work with the Coast Guard, or 'gold' side as they are referred to. Ellis is the instructor and is assisted by his wife.

Since that first class a dozen people have been certified as AUXCHEF graduates and have put their knowledge to work in a variety of situations – preparing and serving different functions for the Coast Guard District 5 Change of Command activities, at a retirement party for the Admiral and at U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary events. Stations and cutters are also starting to utilize the graduates to relieve the duty crew when in port.

“There is just a limited number of cooks on a shift and giving them shore time is hard since they still have to cook for the staff,” Ellis said. “If we have trained auxiliaries that can help on the ship, then the cooks can also have some time off. The hardest part is showing them we’re [auxiliaries] capable of handling the chores.”

With the skills he learned at the Culinary Institute, Ellis will be teaching an advanced skills class in the AUXCHEF program in Yorktown the end of March. Nine auxiliaries have already committed to the two-day class that will feature eight hours of classroom and prep work with the second day committed to preparing the food.

“Interest in the program has grown, particularly from the gold side, who has had an opportunity to see what the auxiliaries can do for themselves as we’ve served several events this past year,” Ellis said. “The cooperation between the two sides is growing and the career side is witnessing what we can do to assist them, besides just working the radio or helping with patrols.”

Introducing the AUXCHEF graduates’ ability to the Coast Guard staff has been a gradual process and has occurred at various auxiliary change of watch dinners attended by Coast Guard officials as well as at some of the functions held at Yorktown and Milford as well as other stations in the Fifth District Southern

“I’m going to make this work,” Ellis said. “This offers our volunteers another opportunity for training and another avenue to serve. As more people experience and see what the AUXCHEF volunteers can do, the more opportunities we’ll have to serve.”

For more information at the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Lake Anna Flotilla 87, visit the website at <http://a0540807.uscgaux.info/index.html>.