UNC Sea Grant

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COAST WATCH

The Changing Guard

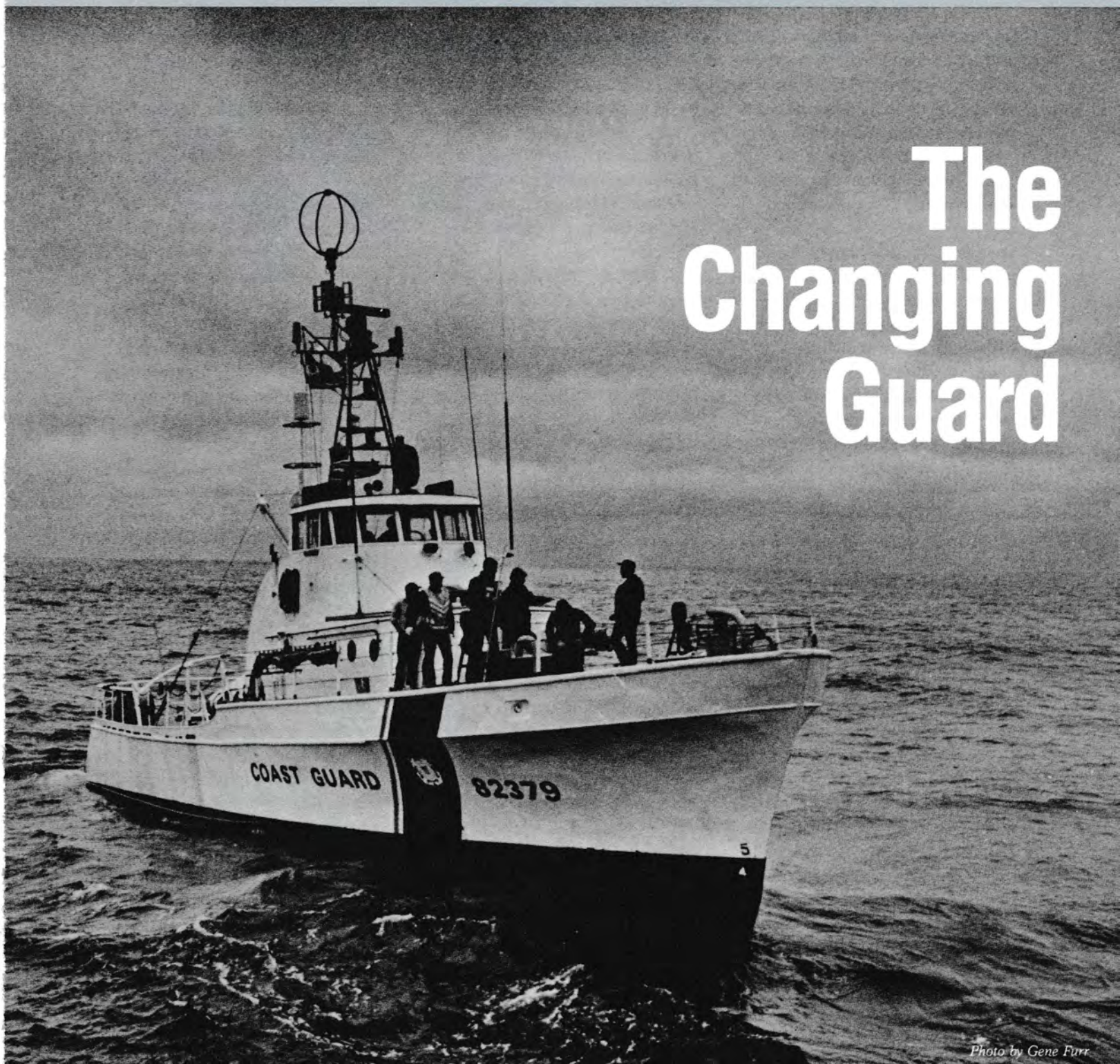

Photo by Gene Furr

Guard Duties

By Kathy Hart

If your vessel is on fire or your boat is taking on water, who do you call?

The United States Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard is well known for its aid to boats and ships in distress. In fact, Coast Guard crews save 16 lives, assist 361 people and salvage about $2.5 million in property on an average day.

But search and rescue is just one Coast Guard mission. The men and women of the Coast Guard do many jobs. They apprehend drug smugglers, replace buoys, clean up oil spills and inspect vessels for safety violations.

The Coast Guard is the primary federal agency entrusted with maritime law enforcement. But what started as a simple directive has mushroomed.

Today's Coast Guardsmen are trained in everything from first aid to fishery regulations to federal drug laws, says Lt. Martin Phillips, commander of the Cape Hatteras Group.

In North Carolina, the Coast Guard operates eight shore stations, one base at Fort Macon, one air station at Elizabeth City and a Marine Safety Office in Wilmington.

Four stations and 150 guardsmen fall under Phillips' command in Group Cape Hatteras. The stations are located at Coinjock, Hatteras, Oregon Inlet and Ocracoke.

Four stations, one base and 280 guardsmen work under the command of Lt. Cmdr. Dale Ward in Group Fort Macon. The stations dot the coast at Hobucken, Swansboro, Wrightsville Beach and Oak Island.

The Fort Macon and Cape Hatteras groups are part of the Coast Guard's 5th District that extends from New Jersey to North Carolina. The district headquarters is in Portsmouth, Va.

The Coast Guard is an armed force of the United States and is equal in status to the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. In peacetime, the Coast Guard serves within the Department of Transportation. During a war or by presidential decree, it reports to the U.S. Navy.

In 1915, the Treasury Department formed the Coast Guard when it combined the Lifesaving Service and Revenue Cutter Service. In 1967, it was transferred from the Treasury Department to the Transportation Department.

Initially, the Coast Guard followed in the footsteps of its parental organizations and confined its duties to rescue and intercepting contraband. During Prohibition, which lasted from 1920 through 1933, guardsmen concentrated on apprehending rum runners, or liquor smugglers.

After Prohibition and World War II, the Coast Guard's primary responsibility shifted to aiding navigation and safety at sea.

During the 1970s, smuggling again reared its head. But this time, the illegal merchandise cached aboard vessels was multimillion-dollar shipments of marijuana and cocaine.

Nationwide, on an average day, the Coast Guard seizes 3,500 pounds of marijuana and 35 pounds of cocaine that total about $6.5 million. Also on an average day, guardsmen help other agencies confiscate another 243 pounds of marijuana and 26 pounds of cocaine worth $3.5 million.

They arrest two smugglers daily and seize a drug vessel every two days.

The effort expended by the Coast Guard to apprehend drug smugglers has increased four- to five-fold in the last 10 years, Ward says. And Ward and Phillips agree that with the increase in drug traffic has come an increase in danger for guardsmen. Drug smugglers are frequently armed.

Now boarding officers must be trained to know drug laws, proper boarding procedure, drug detection and recognition, and self-defense. Often Coast Guard officers are trained alongside U.S. Customs agents in detection methods.

"Every time we find a method smugglers are using to conceal drugs, they come up with a new way," Ward says.

Once a vessel carrying contraband is seized, it is turned over to U.S. Customs for processing by the U.S. Attorney General, Ward says.

Although North Carolina is no Florida, its secluded inlets, islands and bays are inviting transfer spots for smugglers.

"The North Carolina waterways are perfect," Ward says. "Smugglers can get in and out quickly. That's why pirates frequented the North Carolina coast."

Although drug enforcement may be the Coast Guard's toughest assignment, it's not its only one. During the 1970s and 1980s, Con-

gress and the president expanded the Coast Guard's authority to include enforcement of environmental, fishery conservation, pollution, maritime defense and safety laws.

And last year, Congress increased the Coast Guard's duties again when it passed the Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act of 1988. The act was passed to better safety equipment and procedures aboard commercial fishing boats.

When the act's regulations are finalized in 1991, they should save lives, standardize safety procedures, decrease insurance premiums and reduce liability suits.

But the law's passage means even more rules, regulations and laws for Coast Guard officers to know and understand. Even now when the Coast Guard stops a vessel, its boarding officers check for safety offenses, fishing infractions, contraband and environmental violations.

"You name it; we do it all on the water," says Master Chief Petty Officer Wayne Gray, a fourth-generation Coast Guardsman stationed at Oregon Inlet.

Gray, an Avon native, enlisted in the Coast Guard 31 years ago and has seen the Coast Guard swing its focus from search and rescue to law enforcement.

"Today we spend 60 percent of our time enforcing laws," Gray says.

Phillips says the Coast Guard's emphasis to the public on proper training, equipment and safety has reduced the need for search and rescue. Also the advent of sophisticated navigation systems and better weather information has helped more vessels avoid mishaps.

But that doesn't mean the Coast Guard doesn't answer distress calls. It does.

But if neither boaters nor their vessels are in danger, guardsmen refer them to towing companies or nearby boaters for aid.

"By not answering non-emergency calls, we save tax dollars," Ward says. "We don't have unlimited boats and personnel, so it is best not to tie up our search-and-rescue vessels unless there is an emergency.

"But let me emphasize," Ward adds, "if commercial assistance is not available or there's not a good Samaritan nearby, we will respond to a non-emergency call. We monitor every call for help to its completion no matter who comes to the boat's aid."

Fortunately, the Coast Guard gets a little help with its boating safety program from some friends. Nearly 40,000 men and women—all volunteers—serve in the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

These volunteers conduct free courtesy inspections of recreational boats, teach boating safety courses and assist in search-and-rescue operations.

But for many coastal residents, especially Outer Bankers, nothing but joining the Coast Guard itself will do. Many folks have family members who served in the Coast Guard or the old Lifesaving Service (see story, page 3).

"When I was growing up on the island (Hatteras), you either went to work on the water or joined the Coast Guard when you graduated from high school," Gray says. "Today there are more options."

But nonetheless, Gray's son is considering attending the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., to become an officer. If he does, he'll be the fifth generation of his family to join.

"The Coast Guard has been great," Gray says. "I've served three tours in Florida and been to Vietnam. Now I'm back home again. Today's enlisted men are much better off. They have much better equipment and facilities."

But today's guardsmen aren't all men. Approximately 2,600 women serve in the Coast Guard. In fact, the Coast Guard was the first military service to admit women to its academy and the first to assign women as commanding officers of armed vessels.

All in all, more than 36,000 Coast Guard men and women stand ready—"Always ready" their motto says—to ensure our safety on the water, mark our channels, clean up our waterways, protect our natural resources and stop the invasion of drugs.

Photo by Gene Furr

Frying Pan light station keeps a lonely watch off Wrightsville Beach.

Heroes Of The Past

By Nancy Davis

Consider the days before fancy electronic equipment.

No radio signals to help sailors keep their bearings. No radar screens to show obstacles in their paths. And no weather reports to warn of impending bad storms.

Without all those gadgets, shipwrecks off the treacherous Tar Heel coast were commonplace.

But those early sailors in distress did have one thing pulling for them—a group of heroes called the U.S. Lifesaving Service.

From 1848 to 1915, the men of the Lifesaving Service, later to become the U.S. Coast Guard, risked their lives to save others.

And their record is impressive. From 1871 to 1915, the lifesavers tried to rescue 178,741 people. Of those, they saved 177,286.

Now, all that remains to remind us of their heroics are a few weather-beaten, shingled lifesaving stations.

But the heritage is rich, and the descendants of the lifesavers are not about to let their ancestors' stories die.

The Lifesaving Service's beginnings go back to 1848 when a New Jersey congressman introduced a bill to provide rescue equipment for shipwrecked sailors off that coast.

Soon the idea spread, and by 1871, Congress had officially established the U.S. Lifesaving Service as a branch of the Treasury Department.

From 1873 to 1874 only one shipwrecked sailor died in the area with lifesaving stations already established. That record of success led Congress to grant money for stations down through North Carolina.

Here, as many as 29 stations operated at one time. Most of those were clustered between the Virginia line and the tip of Cape Hatteras. They were generally spaced 7 or 8 miles apart.

A roster of Tar Heel lifesavers reads like a page from an Outer Banks phone book—Ballance, Daniels, Etheridge, Meekins, Midgett.

Sumner Midgett comes from one of those families that claims a long line of lifesavers. His father and his grandfather were in the Lifesaving Service.

And Midgett and his father were named after another famous Sumner—Sumner Kimball, the first director of the Lifesaving Service.

Midgett says that at one time, so many men from the Midgett family were lifesavers that folks started calling it the Midgett Navy.

Midgett spent his younger years moving with his father to stations at Ocracoke, Little Kinnakeet, Duck, Cape Fear and Fort Caswell.

"Shipwrecks were common then," he says. "We went for a month one time when they never missed a night getting a call."

On the East Coast, most of the lifesaving stations were of similar construction. Covered with cedar shingles, they were often two stories. The bottom floor was used for storing lifesaving equipment, including the boats.

The typical lifesaving vessels were government-contract built, says Mike Alford, curator of maritime research at the N.C. Maritime Museum.

They were usually 25 to 35 feet long. They were constructed in the lapstrake fashion. The planks were lapped over and fastened to each other, making for a lighter boat, Alford says.

For drills or rescues, the boats were rolled out of the stations on carts through large barn-like doors. Once they reached the surf, the lifesavers lifted the boats and launched them.

Flotation tanks in either end of the boat kept it from sinking if it were swamped with waves, Alford says.

From a tower on top of the station, a lifesaver stood watch over the water by day. At night or during storms or heavy fog, the lifesavers took turns patrolling the beach, Midgett says. They'd either walk or ride horses about 3 miles to the north, then 3 miles to the south.

To prove they had patrolled their section of the beach, the crewman would exchange tokens with the man of the station to the north and south at a keypost between the two.

If a ship were venturing too close to shore, the lifesavers would signal them with a flare.

When a ship was in distress, five or six men launched a surfboat and tried to row out through the crashing waves.

If the ship had grounded close enough to shore, the lifesavers would shoot a line out to the vessel with a lyle gun, a small version of a cannon.

Crew members on the ship secured the line around the mast.

Then a breeches buoy, or a life preserver fitted with a seat, could be sent from shore to the mast. Victims climbed into the buoy and were hauled, one by one, to safety.

The North Carolina coast has an especially rich lifesaving heritage. Some of the most famous rescues recorded occurred off the Outer Banks.

And North Carolina claims the distinction of having the only all-black lifesaving crew.

From 1880 to 1949 when it closed, the Pea Island Lifesaving Station was manned entirely by black personnel.

Agatha Gray, the widow of one of the lifesavers there, is gathering information about the old station. Her husband served there after the Lifesaving Service had become the Coast Guard.

"My husband loved his job," she says. "When we got married, he said, 'I love you dearly, but don't never keep me or hinder me from my job.' "

Gray is especially fond of passing along the story of the rescue of the *E.S. Newman*.

The *Newman* was enroute to Virginia in October 1896 when a hurricane arose. Station Keeper Richard Etheridge called off his patrol for the night because the storm was so violent.

But through the driving rain and vicious wind, a watchman in the lookout tower saw a light offshore.

Keeper Etheridge called his crew into action, and they fought their way to the beach.

But the weather was too rough to fire the lyle gun and the churning surf made it impossible to launch the surfboat.

So the lifesavers secured a rope on shore, then tied it to the two strongest men. Then Etheridge sent them swimming through the surf to the crippled vessel.

The lifesavers made 10 trips to the *Newman* until they had rescued every passenger.

"It's just a story that will make you cry," Gray says. "I can just see those men struggling."

Acts of bravery like that made lifesavers some of the most respected members of the community.

"They had a reputation for doing their job well for very little pay," Midgett says.

Midgett and Gray remember that the men of the Lifesaving Service had an unwritten motto. When a ship was in distress, the only guarantee was that the lifesavers would go into the sea and do everything they could to rescue the victims.

Midgett says his father used to say, "The regulations don't say you have to come back. You just have to go out."

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Visitors to the Outer Banks can take a step back in time at the Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station.

Jim Henry, president of the Chicamacomico Historical Association, says the station in Rodanthe is probably the most historic on the Eastern seaboard because so many heroic rescues took place there. And it's the only remaining station open to visitors.

In the summer, visitors can walk through the station, view artifacts in a small museum and, once a week, watch the beach apparatus drill performed by volunteers and National Park Service personnel.

The exterior of the station has been restored, Henry says. And now, the association is ready to refurbish the interior. But he estimates that it will cost at least $63,000. The association relies on donations and grants.

If you're interested in finding out more about the restoration, contact the Chicamacomico Historical Association, Box 5, Rodanthe, N.C. 27968.

If you want to visit Chicamacomico, call 919/987-2203 for a schedule.

Photo by Michael Halminski

Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station.

Safety On The Seas

By Kathy Hart

On the water, an ounce of prevention may be worth more than a pound of cure. It may be worth your life and that of your family and friends, say U.S. Coast Guard officers.

"Today the Coast Guard definitely puts more emphasis on accident prevention and boating safety," says Lt. Martin Phillips. "Any time we can prevent someone from having to be rescued, we're all better off. On the water, it's often hard to locate a boater in distress, and you don't always have a lot of time."

Most deaths among recreational boaters occur because life jackets are not worn.

"Often the jackets are accessible but not on," Phillips says. "Something happens quickly, and boaters are in the water before they know it. They end up drowning because they didn't have their life jacket on."

And, drinking and boating is just as much of a problem on the water as it is on the road. In fact, Phillips estimates that more than 50 percent of all fatal boating accidents involve alcohol.

"On the water, fatigue sets in quickly when you have a beating sun, whipping winds and wave after wave," Phillips says. "Reasoning fades quicker. Mix alcohol into that, and you have a serious problem with a person's ability to respond and react."

Stricter federal and state boating laws limit boating while intoxicated. To enforce those laws, Phillips' crews administer breathalyzer tests.

Recreational boaters are considered intoxicated if the test results are .10 or higher; commercial operators, .04 or higher.

But Phillips adds that drinking is usually not a problem among commercial fishermen.

A sound boating education can go a long way toward avoiding mishaps on the water, says Lt. Cmdr. Dale Ward.

"The boating public needs to be educated about the dangers of operating a boat and what can happen on the water," he says.

Ward suggests that all boaters enroll in a seamanship course taught by the Coast Guard Auxiliary or the U.S. Power Squadron. Auxiliary members will also conduct a free courtesy examination of your boat and safety equipment.

But Phillips and Ward agree that with more boaters using our coastal waters it may be time to consider a boating license. A license would ensure proper training and establish a minimum driving age.

Rough seas at Wrightsville Beach.

Photo by Gene Furr

THE BACK PAGE

"The Back Page" is an update on Sea Grant activities — on research, marine education and advisory services. It's also a good place to find out about meetings, workshops and new publications. For more information on any of the projects described, contact the Sea Grant offices in Raleigh (919/737-2454). For copies of publications, write UNC Sea Grant, NCSU, Box 8605, Raleigh, N.C. 27695-8605.

Piece by piece, Beach Sweep '88 volunteers picked up 47 tons of trash and recorded it on data cards. Card by card, Sea Grant staff counted what the volunteers found Sept. 24 on North Carolina's beaches.

The totals revealed the types of trash washing up at the coast. And they provided some insight into where the debris may originate.

The data card divided trash into seven different categories. The largest of the seven, plastics, included such items as bags, bottles, diapers, fishing nets, six-pack holders and toys. Altogether, the plastics totaled 55,813 pieces.

The second largest category, paper items such as bags, cartons and newspaper, counted up to 23,616. Styrofoam pieces such as egg cartons, cups and fast food containers ranked third with 19,907.

Tallies of other categories included: metal — 19,480; glass — 9,928; wood — 5,620; rubber — 2,238; and cloth —1,311.

Beach Sweep coordinators sent the counts to Washington, D.C., for final tallies by the Center for Marine Conservation and the Environmental Protection Agency. They also became part of a national database that includes tallies from 24 other coastal cleanups.

As soon as the last bag of garbage was discarded at Beach Sweep '88, coordinators began planning Beach Sweep '89. The cleanup this year is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sept. 23.

Beach Sweep coordinators are looking now for companies that would like to donate supplies, food or funds for printing or educational materials. All donors will be recognized for their contributions. If your company would like to make a donation, call Sea Grant at 919/737-2454. Ask for Lundie Spence or one of the communicators.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has money available to help North Carolina shrimpers buy turtle excluder devices.

Beginning May 1, federal regulations require shrimpers with boats 25 feet or longer to use TEDs in offshore waters in North Carolina.

The devices are designed to exclude endangered sea turtles from nets.

Fishermen can be reimbursed, on a first-come, first-serve basis, for the purchase of federally certified models of TEDs.

For an application, write: TED Purchase Project, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557.

To get landlubbers involved in preserving North Carolina's coast, Raleigh's WRAL-TV is hosting a Carolina Coastal Celebration April 8 and 9 at the Kerr Scott Building on the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

The free event will showcase traditional entertainers, crafts, unusual seafood and educational exhibits about the coastal environment. Sea Grant and the Beach Sweep '89 sponsors will man booths at the two-day event.

WRAL-TV has made a commitment to addressing problems facing North Carolina's sounds and estuaries. The station produced a half-hour documentary, "Troubled Waters," and a series of informational public service announcements.

The station has also produced a booklet, *Sound Advice*. It is a resource guide that tells inland residents how they impact our coastal environment.

For a copy of *Sound Advice*, send $3 to WRAL-TV, P.O. Box 12000, Raleigh, N.C. 27605. Make checks payable to *Sound Advice*. Proceeds from the book will be donated to the N.C. Coastal Federation.

Walter Cronkite will drop anchor in Raleigh in March to talk about an issue near and dear to his heart—the coast and its waterways. The former CBS anchorman will join WRAL-TV and Sea Grant at a forum. It will be held March 11 at 7:30 p.m. at Stewart Theatre on the North Carolina State University campus.

Cronkite, a sailor and coastal enthusiast, will speak about the problems facing our estuaries and coastal rivers.

For more information about the forum, contact WRAL-TV at 919/821-8555.

Koalas and kangaroos, rolling hills and rain forests may not be that far away for 17 teachers. This summer, Lundie Spence, Sea Grant's marine education specialist, and two other science experts will lead a workshop to Australia on global environmental issues.

From July 6 to 25, the teachers will trek down under with Spence, Cathy Conwell of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Ray Ashton of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. They will investigate issues such as rising sea level and rain forest destruction first-hand.

Ten scholarships of $1,500 will be available for interested fourth- to twelfth-grade science teachers. Other criteria for eligibility are listed in an application form available from the Sea Grant office in Raleigh.

Funding for the workshop and scholarships is from the Title II, UNC Math/Science/Education Network. Each scholarship will cover about half the cost of the trip.

For more information or an application form, write Spence at Sea Grant.

Continued on next page

Winter is planting time at the coast. If you're a coastal property owner, now is the time to protect your investment with beachgrasses, shrubs and ground cover.

And Sea Grant has a publication that will help you. *Seacoast Plants of the Carolinas for Conservation and Beautification* is a general guide on the use of plants for landscaping and stabilizing sandy coastal soils. The 206-page paperback book contains illustrated descriptions of more than 100 plants that are native to the North Carolina coast.

For your copy, write Sea Grant. Ask for UNC-SG-73-06. The cost is $4.50.

Ten years ago, the dunes in front of the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area looked more like mole hills than mountains. So Sea Grant's coastal engineer Spencer Rogers developed a low-cost method to begin repair of the damaged dunes.

For nine years now, the Christmas Tree Recycling Project has thrived. Each year after New Year's Day, people bring their Christmas trees and place them on the dunes. After several days of high winds, the trees can trap one to two feet of sand. Vegetation spreads onto the new sand and permanent repair of the damaged dune takes place.

Although volunteers save a tree to save a dune, their efforts also help save the state thousands of dollars. By placing 8,000 trees in the dunes instead of expensive sand fencing, Rogers estimates the project saved $55,000.

The Christmas tree project, run in conjunction with the Fort Fisher State Recreation area and the N.C. Aquarium, has been so successful that it doesn't need to continue, Rogers says. The dunes have built back up to a safe, protective height.

Two North Carolina students have been chosen for National Sea Grant Program internships in Washington, D.C.

Josh Kardon, a law student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will intern in the office of Barbara Boxer, a congresswoman from California.

John Baker, a student at the School of Natural Resources at Duke University, will intern with the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee.

Kardon and Baker were among 10 legislative interns selected this year.

Sea Grant Director B.J. Copeland says the internships offer students a chance to extend their education beyond the classroom.

"It's a great experience for them to see how the system works, and it allows them to expand their education," Copeland says.

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Address correction requested