

“The Coast Guard has been serving Alaska since the late 1800’s.”

The Coast Guard chose Homer as a Home Port in 1968, because we had both the local fishermen and our local legislator, Clem Tillion, who represented the communities across the Bay. Seldovia had been hard hit by the earthquake and Clem was trying to bring economic development to the area; Seldovia would have been a logical place for a search and rescue detachment.

However, Seldovia was just a little too isolated and Homer had come a long way towards becoming a City. There was a dock and a large Harbor, along with a robust commercial fishing Industry. The fishermen requested a small boat station with a search and rescue craft to be stationed in Kachemak Bay, in order to provide safety to the growing fleet.

Clem petitioned the Coast Guard for a search and rescue boat, and here it began. The Coast Guard chose to put a buoy tender in Homer. “Aids to Navigation” was in great need for this growing area and the increased traffic in Cook Inlet, especially for ships headed to Anchorage.

The first buoy tender was the *CGC Ironwood*. Her homeport was Honolulu, Hawaii. The ship's crew and families were all sent to Homer. The ship arrived in the summer of 1968. The Coast Guard was made to believe that there was plenty of available housing in Homer, families would have no problem, but they didn't send anyone to look.

When they arrived, frontier cabins with a gravel path were all the crew could find. The Federal Government had rules for families accompanying the Coast Guard's members, and the accommodations in Homer didn't come close. Consequently, all the wives and kids who left Honolulu en route to Homer, ended up stranded in Seattle's port of entry. It took six months for those who were married to find rentals and work with landlords to get the living quarters up to code so their families could come to Homer.

On January 5, 1969 Homer became the official homeport for the *CGC Ironwood*. Fifty-five crewmen, many with families, provided Homer the economic boost it needed. Family housing soon became top priority and put many local residents to work. The *CGC Sedge* replaced the *Ironwood* in 1975 when it was sent to Kodiak.

Later, in 1979, the small boat traffic in Kachemak Bay had increased dramatically in Homer. All fifty-five men of the *CGC Sedge* were on one-hour recall rescue service to the recreational mariner. That year, the Coast Guard Auxiliary was formed. The “Flotilla 2-1,” was a volunteer group of experienced mariners who donated their time. The Coast Guard provided equipment, training and fuel.

A secondary private, non-profit organization formed next called “Rescue 21.” They raised funds and purchased a boat named the *Quannah P.*, keeping it available for rescues around the Bay. This group originally started the Homer Halibut Derby and the Chamber took it over 23 years ago.

“Rescue 21” continues to help with fundraisers and other activities to help support safe boating in the Homer harbor. They created a local *Seafood Cookbook* which is still a favorite.

Finally, in 1992 Homer got its high-speed patrol boat with Search and Rescue capabilities. The Homer Harbor became homeport to the *USCGC Roanoke Island*.

The crew of 16 brought families to Homer increasing the city’s tax base.

In 2003, the *CGC Sedge* was retired, and the new state-of-the-art *CGC Hickory*, a 225 ft ocean going buoy tender with a crew of 50 arrived. A new Pioneer Dock had been designed and built with the bigger ship in mind. The Coast Guard and the Alaska State Ferries Marine Highway System were stakeholders with the city and obtained funds for a larger dock.

Next time you see one of our service men and women proudly bearing the Coast Guard uniform, thank them for their dedication and service to our community! You may want to thank Clem Tillion too—he is still as large as life here in Homer.

More Facts:

Homer is homeport for two Coast Guard ships:

- The USCGC Hickory, commissioned in 2003 with a crew of 50, and is a 225 ft. Aids to Navigation Vessel (buoy tender).
- The USCGC Roanoke Island has been home ported here since 1992 with a crew of 16. It is a 110 ft. high endurance cutter.

Their missions are Aids to Navigation, Search and Rescue, Fisheries Patrol, Homeland Security, and Search and Rescue.

We are lucky to still have an active “Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 2-1.” A volunteer group tasked by the Coast Guard to provide assistance to mariners in Kachemak Bay. They operate the Coast Guard owned *Safe Boat* for rescues in the Bay.

*By Kate Mitchell
NOMAR*