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Bill Washington Plots Captains' Course

Bill Washington spends most of his time on the water operating tourboats out of National Harbor on the Potomac River, but he's tied to Annapolis and the Chesapeake Bay in two important ways:

First, since the Potomac is a tributary of the Chesapeake, and Captain Washington occasionally serves as a delivery captain, taking recreational boats to new ports in the Carolinas or Florida, he's very familiar with the portion of the Bay from Point Lookout to Cape Charles.

Second, this year he took over as president of the **Chesapeake Area Professional Captains Association (CAPCA)**, an organization of Coast Guard-licensed captains whose members primarily operate small commercial vessels on the Bay and work as delivery captains all up and down the East Coast.

"It's a great place to be a professional mariner," says Captain Washington, who began boating as a youngster in New York and qualified as a captain 21 years ago while he was a government manager in the District of Columbia. "The Bay and the Potomac have every kind of vessel imaginable, from dinghies to Navy warships."

Captain Washington has his job cut out for him in CAPCA. With him in the vice president's slot last year, the 26-year-old organization completed a sweeping makeover, improving its hire-a-captain service, increasing its membership benefits, expanding its continuing education program, and building a new, more dynamic website.

It also widened its public service effort, opening its meetings and some of its courses to the public, inviting non-members to sign up for informative e-mail messages that include Coast Guard alerts and bulletins, and setting up its own speakers bureau to provide guest speakers for yacht clubs and other maritime-related organizations.

"We have all the ingredients in place now, and we hope to be doing bigger things in the near future," Captain Washington says.

Bill Washington has been "messaging around in boats" since his teens. Born in New York City, he learned to sail during summers in boat-friendly Sag Harbor, Long Island; then switched to power-

boats when he moved to Maryland. He earned his Coast Guard license 21 years ago. He now holds a 100-ton master's license with a towing endorsement.

For most of his time in this area, Captain Washington has led a two-pronged life, working at day jobs as a computer graphics specialist and part-time as a tourboat skipper. He retired from his daytime career in 2001, and has been working as captain of tourboats, towboats, and private yachts, both power and sail, some as long as 100 feet.

He also has served as a volunteer for several public-service efforts, including serving as second mate on a floating-classroom cruise for young people aboard the square-rigger *Half Moon* in 2005. And he's even conducted on-the-water marriages as a government-certified wedding officiant.

CAPCA's roster includes some 300 active members. Most hold licenses as masters of vessels between 50 and 200 gross registered tons, such as tourboats, water-taxis, towboats and the like. A few have licenses limited to skippering small passenger vessels carrying up to six persons. Some have unrestricted licenses—for big ships, all oceans.

Although you must have a current captain's license to join CAPCA, you needn't actually be working as a captain to qualify. Some members hold a license but do other things for a living. Most also have recreational boats that they maintain for their personal use.

"It's a great group, and I'm proud to be heading it," Bill Washington says. "We're going to be plotting a course for the next several years." ~by *Capt. Art Pine*



■ Capt. Bill Washington