



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
Chief Petty Officer Michael Spencer, a rescue swimmer with the U.S. Coast Guard for the past 20 years, was awarded the Coast Guard Medal Monday for rescuing two people at Cape Kiwanda in February.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
 From left, Capt. Bill Timmons, commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's sector Columbia River, awarded Lt. Daniel Cathell and Petty officer Justin Roberts the Aviation Standardization Excellence Award. The two oversaw standardization training for Air Station Astoria, rated the best among all nine of HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter bases assessed in the U.S.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
 Lt. Cmdr. Jim Cooley, right, was awarded the Capt. Marion Gus Shrode Aviation Safety Award Monday at Air Station Astoria by Capt. Bill Timmons, commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's Sector Columbia River.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
 Lt. Loren Nordyke of North Lincoln County Fire & Rescue was one of two people pulled out of the Punch Bowl beneath Cape Kiwanda in February by Chief Petty Officer Michael Spencer, a rescue swimmer with the U.S. Coast Guard.

Honor: Spencer showed his heroics during the Great Coastal Gale, too

Continued from Page 1A

Harbor Feb. 1 when they were told that 17-year-old Megan Owens of Marysville, Washington, had fallen into the surf Cape Kiwanda. The crew stopped for fuel and headed for Pacific City.

"She had been in water around an hour by the time we got there," Spencer said of Owens. "After an hour being in the water in jeans and a sweat-shirt, survivability is going down."

The crew scanned along the coastline to see if Owens had washed up in a cave or nook. Spencer said his crew members then spotted a rescuer motoring a Jet Ski in a tidal inlet leading to a sea cave below the cliffs of the cape, towing a second rescuer on a board. Spencer said the crew saw the ski and board crest a wave and fall 10 feet, the passenger on the board falling off into the water.

"We immediately switched from searching for her (Owens) to them," he said.

In the Punch Bowl

Loren Nordyke and Eric Maestas, with North Lincoln County Fire & Rescue, had arrived about 30 minutes after Owens reportedly fell into the ocean at Cape Kiwanda after climbing with some friends. Nordyke, who attended Monday's ceremony, drove the Jet Ski into the Punch Bowl, tow-

'If you listen to the audio, again, those guys are rock stars. Everyone was calm and doing their job to a T.'

Michael Spencer

chief petty officer and rescue swimmer with the U.S. Coast Guard, speaking of the crew's even-toned demeanor throughout the rescue

ing Maestas behind him on a board used to carry out survivors.

Nordyke said he tried a couple times to swing around and pick up Maestas on the Jet Ski. But Maestas was knocked out and getting close to the rocks, Nordyke said, so he went into the water after his partner.

"I was trying to keep us off the rocks and keep the ski away from us," Nordyke said.

Spencer credited Nordyke with keeping his partner alive and breathing while the helicopter crew prepared for the rescue. It only took a couple minutes before Spencer was being lowered 80 feet on a hook from the helicopter to the roiling surf below with a quick stop to retrieve Maestas.

"He was pretty out of it," Spencer said of Maestas, who suffered a concussion, broken nose and a laceration along his upper lip. "It was as close to unconscious as you're going to get. I

pinned his arms down on the outside of the strap."

Maestas, who couldn't attend Monday because he was back at work, told The News Guard in Lincoln City that he vaguely remembered a Coast Guard swimmer strapping him into a harness, but not much more. The helicopter crew set Spencer and Maestas down on a rocky flat about 40 feet above, where medics were waiting. The helicopter then lowered Spencer back into the Punch Bowl, where Nordyke had been washed into a cave.

Rock stars

Spencer has helped train other Coast Guard rescuers on techniques for operating in a cave. In all of those trainings, he said, "I've mentioned that I would not go into a cave still hooked to a helicopter."

Spencer said rescuers who do so risk their hoist line being hooked on

an underwater object, pulling them under. But Spencer said he felt confident enough in the crew to take the risk.

Leaving behind visual contact with the helicopter, Spencer silenced all radio communications except between himself and his hoist operator. He found Nordyke in the cave, trying to mount the Jet Ski but with little luck. After reaching Nordyke, Spencer worked his arms into the harness, before giving the hoist operator the "up easy" order to slowly pull the two out of the cave.

"If you listen to the audio, again, those guys are rock stars," Spencer said of the crew's even-toned demeanor throughout the rescue. "Everyone was calm and doing their job to a T."

After the rescuers were taken out of the water, Maestas was transferred in a rescue basket to awaiting paramedics. The Coast Guard continued searching for Owens until the next day.

Spencer said his crew was on scene for a few hours searching for the girl. "You're doing what you can, but in the back of your mind, we're kind of in recovery mode," he said, adding part of the search is providing closure.

Heroes

"In my mind, to be a great aviator, to be a great flight mechanic, to be a

great rescue swimmer ... that makes you hero," said Capt. Bill Timmons, commander of Sector Columbia River.

The motto of the Coast Guard is *semper paratus*, Latin for "always ready." Timmons said that means being ready to go into harm's way in the service of others. "We ingrain this expectation into every single member here at Air Station Astoria."

Spencer was a rescue swimmer stationed at Air Station Astoria when the Great Coastal Gale hit in early December 2007. He was just coming off a surgery and re-entering the rotation when he and the members of two Coast Guard air crews were sent to Chehalis, Washington, where the Chehalis River had busted through a levee and left hundreds stranded.

Spencer and his crew worked their way around Chehalis performing some very unique rescues, hoisting people off of roofs, out of windows and from their cars. He said they lifted 30 people to safety over several hours.

For his heroism, Spencer received the Distinguished Flying Cross, a medal given to a member of any branch who exhibits "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight."

The honors are great, Spencer said, but the best feeling is when everyone else is up a creek without a paddle, he can come to their rescue.



COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

March of Dimes Nurse of the Year Awards Nurse of the Year!

Congratulations to Oregon and Southwest Washington's 2016 Small Hospital Nurse of the Year, Kendra Gohl! Kendra is a certified infection preventionist and manager of CMH's Care Management department.

CMH is also proud to be home to 11 award finalists! Congratulations to:

- Kelsey Betts
- Amy Karsten
- Jay Reynolds
- Maria Shipley
- Casseopia Fisher
- Shannon Lackey
- Brooke Roberts
- Brandy Spencer
- Jenny Jacques
- Jamee Meier
- Mariah Rudolff



Nurse of the Year winner Kendra Gohl (right) with Trece Gurrad, VP of Patient Care Services.