

Coast Guard Celebrates 220th Anniversary Downtown

August 4, 2010 4:24pm



Alexander Hamilton founded the predecessor of the U.S. Coast Guard in 1790.

Artist: Mike Mazer

By Julie Shapiro

DNAinfo Reporter/Producer

FINANCIAL DISTRICT — When U.S. Coast Guard Chief Warrant Officer Raymond Pagan was in boot camp over 20 years ago, his commanding officer taught him a lesson he never forgot.

The officer pointed to a portrait of Alexander Hamilton, who founded the Coast Guard in 1790, and asked Pagan who he was.

Pagan didn't know.

"He didn't like my answer," Pagan, 41, recalled Wednesday afternoon at the Coast Guard's [220th anniversary celebration](#) in Federal Hall. "He screamed, 'Give me 20 push-ups.'"

The experience opened Pagan's eyes to the long and rich history of the Coast Guard, and he is now an expert on Hamilton and the agency's early days.

Originally known as the Revenue Cutter Service, the Coast Guard initially had a mission that was more practical than altruistic: Hamilton wanted to stop newly minted American citizens from bringing goods into the country illegally, and whenever ships were lost, Hamilton wanted to take every measure to recover valuable cargoes.

The agency's mission has since grown to include, among other responsibilities, drug interception and environmental protection, most recently showcased by its key oversight role in the Gulf oil spill cleanup.

On 9/11, the Coast Guard led the evacuation of the areas closest to the World Trade Center, and stands ready to respond if the need again arises, said Capt. Linda Fagin, who recently took over the Coast Guard's command in New York and northern New Jersey.

Fagin, 47, said the Coast Guard has doubled the number of workers and boats in Station New York since 9/11. The port is the third largest in the country and saw 800 million tons of cargo pass through last year.

"The Port of New York is vital to the economy of the country," Fagin said, adding that for that reason it is also a terrorist target.

"We're out there 24/7, continuing to provide support and protection," she said.

Fagin spoke surrounded by paintings from the [Coast Guard Art Program](#), which recruits volunteer artists to document the Coast Guard in action.

Amy DiGi, 36, a Bronx artist who contributed a painting of the Coast Guard responding to a small oil spill in northern California, said she sees her artwork as a way of giving back to the Coast Guard workers who risk their lives.

"I do what I can," she said. "I paint. I volunteer with what I've got."

The artwork is on exhibit at Federal Hall, 26 Wall St., through Aug. 12.

Read more: <http://dnainfo.com/20100804/downtown/coast-guard-celebrates-220th-anniversary-downtown#ixzz0vqpQWvjn>