

Coast Guard Duty Just Got Better

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cape to all kinds of nearby diversions. The rec room houses a pool table, video game, ping-pong table, and, of course, television. A next-door storage room holds more: tennis and volleyball nets and a "morale" boat for fishing expeditions.

There are also administrative offices, a mess (dining area), and upstairs a conference room, duty quarters and plenty of storage space.

A few steps away from this facility is the new electronics shop, converted from the former communications center and also attractively garbed in grey cedar shakes. Linking the station to the river is the new seawall, pier and buoy pad. Docked there, along with the *Blackberry*, are the two Coast Guard boats, a 45-footer and a 41-footer.

One was built heavily counter-weighted so that in turbulent surf it will roll over and right itself, said Arndt.

From that vantage point, he pointed out an unusual historic sight.

"You won't often see three generations of Coast Guard stations within a block of each other," he said.

Looking back from the river one can see in a glance the new station, its predecessor, built in 1932 for 10 people, a few yards away, and across the road a private home that was the original station in the early 1900's.

Despite the luxury look of it, this station is a workplace where much critical intervention takes place. The Oak Island Coast Guard has jurisdiction on the Intracoastal Waterway to the Carolina Beach bridge, and on the Cape Fear River up to Fayetteville.



STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

SENIOR CHIEF J.D. ARNDT (right) confers with Seaman Galen Miles in the communications room of the new Coast Guard station.

"We provide initial response in pollution cases," Arndt said. "If a boater is seen pumping bilge into the Intracoastal Waterway, for example, we stop him and take water samples, then call the Marine Safety Office for an in-depth investigation."

They also enforce Marine Fisheries regulations.

"Commercial fishermen can only take certain species and sizes of fish," he said, "and how they catch them is regulated, too, and the season is limited."

Arndt said the Coast Guard is the smallest of the country's armed forces, with 38,000 men and women on active duty.

"We're smaller than the New York Police Department," he said with a laugh.

The Guard's role today is increasingly important, especially in identifying drug activity and helping make the water safe for the growing number of boaters.

The new Oak Island Coast Guard Station was dedicated in ceremonies held May 22.

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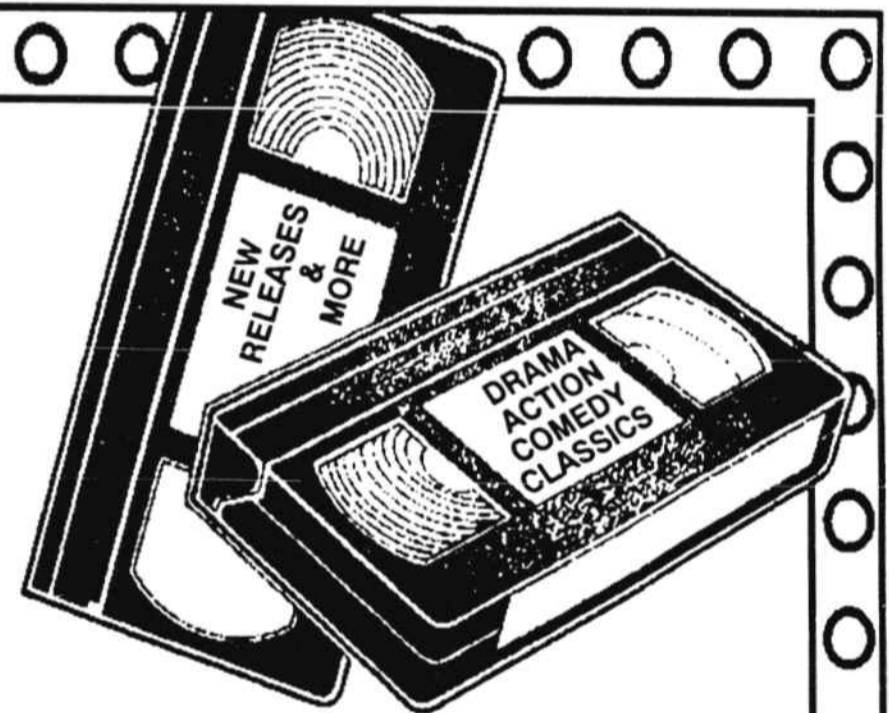
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