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Provincetown Advocate - Aug. 9, 1979

Provincetown welcomes new station

By Susan Areson

Ten years of planning culminated Monday in the dedication of the new, solar-heated Coast Guard station in Provincetown's West End, marking as well the social and physical integration of the Coast Guard into the Provincetown community.

The solar panels in "Station Provincetown," the first solar-heated government building in Massachusetts, absorbed the morning sun as the first cool breezes in weeks blew from Provincetown harbor. About 150 invited guests, including Provincetown officials, retired servicemen and their families and Coast Guardsmen from nearby stations, gathered for the ceremony.

Neighbors and interested passersby lined the gates to watch the official dedication.

The occasion was highlighted by the warm welcome townspeople displayed as well as by the beautiful weather. Residents and neighbors heaped praise on the new facility and on the Coast Guard in general, in contrast to sometimes strained relations in the past when the Coast Guard was isolated from the community at the Race Point station.

The positive welcome and new sense of community was illustrated by two events in the dedication ceremony.

Commander William McKellar, who retired from the Coast Guard after 34 years of service and who has been very active in the Provincetown community, had the honor of hoisting the Coast Guard ensign to fly next to the U.S. and Massachusetts flags. Elizabeth Moffett Johnson, daughter of renowned Provincetown painter Ross Moffett, dedicated one of her father's paintings, which will hang in Station Provincetown.

Speakers at the ceremony included U.S. Rep. Gerry Studds, who delivered the dedication address, Vice Admiral Robert Scarborough, vice-commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Rear Admiral William Schwob, commander of the First Coast Guard District, and Senior Chief Petty Officer Ronald Knipple, officer in charge of Station Provincetown.

Studds, who was extremely persistent in Congress to get money in the budget to build the new station, was lauded by the Coast Guard for his efforts. Studds was also instrumental in making Station Provincetown solar heated.

Studds took his first tour through the completed \$2.2 million facility Monday before the ceremony. He remarked about the beauty of the place as compared to when he had toured it in its early construction stages.

"I feel I've grown up with this station," Studds told the crowd. He said Richard Nixon, who was president during Studds' first term, cut the money for Station Provincetown out of the Coast Guard's budget.

"As a young congressman I didn't know what to do when a president did mean and unreasonable things like that," he said, but added that by his second term when

President Gerald Ford cut the money out of the budget he had learned how to put it back in.

Vice Admiral Scarborough said, "If it had not been for Gerry Studds we would have had a station here but it would probably not have been until the turn of the century. Scarborough, who predicted a "great future" for the solar-heated station, said he was in charge of the weather for the dedication ceremony.

Studds said he hopes the station will serve as a symbol for the nation encouraging the installation of solar energy. "Not only is it clean, not only is it safe but it is free from international political disruptions," he said. He said he hopes there will be a day when the dedication of a solar heated facility will be so commonplace it "will be greeted with a yawn."

Studds said that when he toured the station that morning, there was a distress call to the Coast Guard from a fishing boat off the Georges Bank.

"This is not just a spot of beauty. This is a place with a very serious mission," he said.

On a lighter note, Studds remarked that it was "purely coincidental" that within two months after he launched his 16-foot dory in the West End that a new Coast Guard station opened less than 200 feet from where the boat is moored.

The new station, sitting on a one-and-three-quarter-acre lot that once housed an old cold storage and cannery, was designed specifically to blend in with the surrounding neighborhood and preserve its historic value. The praise and welcome the Coast Guard received Monday showed that they were successful in this mission.

The main building in the new station, which houses the barracks, the operations room, the recreation room, the galley and the mess hall, is built as a series of wings resembling small Cape Cod houses tacked together. The building will house 24 Coast Guardsmen. The building, which is beautifully finished inside with huge windows, and mahogany and oak woodwork, is almost like a luxury hotel with little porches overlooking Provincetown harbor.

The designers paid close attention to detail in planning the station, right down to choosing a wood stain that will eventually weather to the hue of many of the surrounding houses. The old cannery building, which will be used mainly for storage, was carefully reconstructed complete with the little decorative towers on the roof that were once a popular subject for local artists.

Chief Knipple opened his remarks to the crowd by welcoming it to "Harbor View Condominiums." He said a couple stopped in recently to ask whether all of the condominiums had been sold.

Studds, while joking that many have asked him as well when the restaurant will open in the new building or if it can be converted to condominiums, said he is pleased the Coast Guard move puts the men "literally in the mainstream of things."

The distance from the Race Point Coast Guard Station to Provincetown often translated into a social isolation for the men. They had to drive three-and-a-half miles to MacMillan Wharf from Race Point to get to their boats to answer a call. Now the men can rush down to the end of the new 1400-foot pier where their two boats are docked.

Knipple said the Coast Guard has answered 40 distress calls since they moved from Race Point July 19. "It was nice not to have to drive three-and-a-half miles to get to our boats to tend to these cases," he said.

Scarborough presented the official Coast Guard

plaque for the station, which was hung in the lobby after the ceremony. The dedication was also marked by Schwob reading official orders placing the Provincetown station in service and the Race Point station out of service.

The ceremony ended with Moffett's presentation of her father's painting. The painting depicts a 1942 scene of the Coast Guard aiding merchant seamen whose boat had been torpedoed by the Germans.

Music for the ceremony was provided by the Northeastern Navy Band. It added its own touch to the dedication ceremony by closing the dedication march with the favorite navy tune, "Anchors Aweigh."

The ceremony was followed by a buffet and campagne reception for the invited guests. The station was open to the public in the afternoon for a reception and tours.