

2024 Geoff Pagels SAR Professional of the Year

Sector Award

Presented to:

Sector Jacksonville:

CDR Nicholas Barrow, Mr. William (Tony) Wells,
OS1 Blake Mann, Mr. Rex Walsingham, OS2 Adrian
Gutierrez, and OS2 Steven Rivera Moreno

At 1700, Sector Jacksonville was notified by the mother of an overdue and missing person last seen at home at midnight, who had gone fishing in an eight-foot small boat sometime before 0700. Recognizing a diminishing three-hour window of daylight and the length of time the fisherman had been missing without contact, the Sector Jacksonville SAR Mission Coordinator (SMC) determined the case to be in the distress phase, dispatched Coast Guard air and surface assets, and initiated a multi-agency search.

Due to outstanding partnerships built and maintained over many years, St. Augustine Fire and Police Departments, St. Johns Sheriff's Office, St. Johns County Fire Rescue, and Florida Fish and Wildlife joined the search with additional boats and aircraft. A local command post established at Lighthouse Boat Ramp enabled force integration and on scene tactical coordination for the Command Center watch team.

In the first several hours of the search, the team developed and managed nearly 30 independent sorties involving eight boats and three aircraft in portions of the Intercoastal Waterway where the fisherman was known to operate. After sunset and with no sightings, the team paused to re-evaluate their search planning assumptions and theories used in search planning to account for the possibility that the boat may have been swept out to sea in the early morning hours. This was a critical juncture that put into motion a series of actions which ultimately saved the missing fisherman's life.

Skillfully managing inter-agency resources to cover other plausible areas in the Tolomato, Matanzas, and San Sebastian Rivers, CGC Coho and an RB-M were dispatched for offshore searches overnight. Prioritizing a larger air asset coverage area over track spacing more appropriate for a small search object, a first light search with multiple split patterns was generated for a C-130 aircraft.

This search resulted in the missing fisherman being located at 1000 on 05 August, first by radar and then visually, in the northeastern portion of the C-130's assigned three-hour search, 12

miles offshore. CGC Coho was vectored to the fisherman's location, brought on board the cutter, and rushed to awaiting emergency medical services in St. Augustine. After being at sea for 30 hours, the rescued fisherman was severely dehydrated and suffering from sun poisoning; however, he made a full recovery.

The mission excellence and unity of effort demonstrated in this case directly contributed to the rescue of the missing fisherman from his swamped eight-foot boat.