

Roy Eaton bestowed volunteer award from Canadian Safe Boating Council

In Toronto, on Sunday, January 10th, Roy Eaton was awarded the prestigious Volunteer of the Year, a National Award by the Canadian Safe Boating Council of Canada (CASBA). During the Gala Evening at the Sheraton Hotel Centre, over 100 enthusiastic people were present, including Margaret and Jim Van Camp from Little Current, who surprised Roy and his wife Margaret by attending. I flew in from New York City to honour the Eatons, for whom I have the highest regard, and also to attend the Toronto Boat Show.



Roy Eaton's Award was presented by Host Ted Rankine, who told how Roy began the Cruisers Net, and how popular it has become every summer to boaters in the North Channel. The alliance of the Canadian Safe Boating Council members are committed to learning competence in boating and preventing boating injuries across the seas, from Halifax and St. Johns, to Vancouver and the Yukon. The evening was devoted to honouring the winners of an annual CASBC competition celebrating outstanding achievements in safe and responsible boating. Two recipients were from British

Columbia, one from the North West Territories, Roy and two others from Ontario and one from New Brunswick.

Ted Rankine, Host and Organizer of the Dinner hailed Roy; "This is the highest honour, celebrating a body of work that has contributed to a safe marine environment. We've seen the database of callers on the Cruiser Network since you've begun. It is amazing how your listeners and callers have increased. This year, 5,848 calls were recorded from 1,003 individual boats. Reports from those who nominated you have told about how you helped a boater with a fish hook embedded in his hand. How you have relayed good news: "Hello Grandma!" And how you have helped in times of difficulty: "Please call home."

Roy began in a cramped office near the bar at the Anchor Inn. Bruce O'Hare, the owner, is so generous, that he has funded the growth of the network. The following year, Roy moved up to the second floor conference room, where boaters now come to land to visit Roy, listen in and help him record boat names and numbers. Cruising World Magazine wrote a feature about sailing and boating in the North Channel on Roy and Bruce.

I have stood in the back of the room during the summer to hear Roy's broadcast, writing that he is "Manitoulin's Summer Morning Man." After that, I go and have a delicious breakfast at the restaurant below.

"It's still a shock to receive this award," Roy said, standing at the podium, thanking everyone for the Plaque of Honour he received. "To think that a number of people took the time to nominate me is greatly appreciated. All of you present are invited to call in this summer when you are in the region. If you have a problem or need help, I give out my home phone number."

Roy rises at 5 AM during July and August to prepare the morning's broadcast of weather, news and sports scores. He does a feature, "This Day in History," and shares historical facts about Little Current and the surrounding area. He also tells of local happenings, dinners, shows and what to do on the island and events along the North Channel.

Roy had become an informal ambassador for Manitoulin Island operating on the local VHF Marine Channel. The Canadian Coast Guard, listening and admiring his daily broadcasts, realized he has become so valuable, he is listed with the Thunder Bay Coast Guard, which has responsibility in this region and the Trenton Air Search and Rescue Team. The channel was changed to Channel 71 to become the formal home of the Little Current Cruisers Net, broadcast from the Anchor Inn.

Roy's unique voice blends his authority as a former teacher and principal, a practiced sailboat captain plying the North Channel, with his personal warmth and constant tinges of humour, his marvelous irony at times, and fun. But he is all business when he opens his daily broadcast with :"Is there any emergency, medical or priority traffic?" He has helped with a gamut of emergencies, helping to solve them as quickly as possible.

Each broadcast ends with call-is, and boats over a 50 mile radius call in with name and location. Boaters have come to love Roy's broadcast so much, that they come to The Anchor Inn to the second floor to meet him, bring a burgee of their yacht club to pin on the wall, and then go downstairs to have a delicious breakfast at The Anchor Inn. That's what I do.

It has been an honour for me to fly up to be with Margaret and Roy Eaton, and Margaret and Jim Van Camp to celebrate just one of Roy's charitable and memorable network.

Hail to Roy Eaton, Recipient of Canadian Volunteer of the Year for 2009, and to Bruce O'Hare, who supports him from the sidelines, and to the constant, tireless work of the Canadian Safe Boating Council.