

# ***An Overview of the Peace River Power Squadron***

By Terry Karcich, AP

The Peace River Power Squadron (PRPS) became one of 450 nationwide units of the United States Power Squadron (USPS) on December 4, 1972 and was recognized as the 17<sup>th</sup> Squadron in District 22 (D/22). It was incorporated as of December 30, 1976. The Executive Committee (ExCom) also serves as the Board of Directors. A brief history of the USPS helps to put our own history in perspective.

The USPS was founded in 1914 by the power boat division of the Boston Yacht Club as a social club for owners of the newly introduced "motor boats." During WW I, USPS members taught piloting and navigation to Merchant Marine seamen. After the war, the USPS was expanded to include all types of boats and has educated more than 3 million boaters as of 2000. There are about 60,000 members in all 50 states and some U.S. territories. Approximately one half of USPS members are sailors and there have been efforts made to change the Squadron names to reflect this fact. At the PRPS September 1998 general membership meeting, a motion was introduced to change the name to Peace River Sail and Power Squadron. The membership voted against the motion.

The formation of a US Power Squadron in the Port Charlotte area started in 1972 because there were so many USPS members living full or part-time in the area. A new Squadron was also desirable because information about the Peace River, the Intracoastal Waterway, and Charlotte Harbor waters was needed in light of the increasing number of boaters. The closest Squadrons were in Fort Myers and Venice; therefore, a new Squadron in the Port Charlotte area was logical.

An article in a local newspaper appeared on June 13, 1972, inviting all past and present USPS members living in the area, who were interested in helping form a new Squadron, to contact Herbert Wolfe. On August 11, 1972, a meeting was held in the Punta Gorda Municipal Auditorium to discuss the matter. The group included 1 Past District Commander, 7 Past Commanders, 3 N's, and 10 AP's. Because of the high number of qualified USPS members, no sponsoring squadron was required. In fact, District Educational Officer, William S. Allen, stated that he had never attended a meeting with so many past commanders or navigators. D/C Louis Cook recommended that a new Punta Gorda - Port Charlotte area US Power Squadron be given a charter.

At a second meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup>, a slate of officers for the new Squadron was proposed and elected. The first Commander was Robert E. Kloske. The first tasks were the completion of the organization's structure and the planning of education courses. By-laws had to be written; committees had to be formed and staffed. The members voted to hold general membership meetings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Executive Committee meetings on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month.

The Peace River Power Squadron was chartered on December 4, 1972. The Chartering Ceremony and first Change of Watch (COW) were held on February 24, 1973. The first issue of the Pilot was mailed in March/April.

The proposed Squadron participated in the October 1972 Boat Show. More than 100 people signed up for the first Public Boating Course scheduled for January 16, 1973. Education of the boating public as well as continuing education of members has been the primary activity of the PRPS over the years. It offers 4 Public Boating Courses annually, a one day Boat-Smart course and a half day Chart-Smart course. Advanced and elective courses for members include seamanship, piloting, navigation, engine maintenance, and other useful subjects. The education program has won many awards at the district and national levels.

One of the early members and a founder of the PRPS was Harold Mitchell Walker, who was born in Ossining, N.Y., in 1904. He was a silent screen actor, served in the Navy during WWI, and became a famous animator of Betty Boop, Felix the Cat, Mutt & Jeff, and Popeye. A life long boating enthusiast and USPS member, Mr. Walker helped found and organize many Southeastern US Power Squadrons. He moved to Charlotte County from Atlanta, Georgia, in 1972, and continued his work with the USPS. He taught all courses and promoted the Officer's Training Program which he chaired for many years. At the D/22 Spring Conference, he received his 50<sup>th</sup> year membership plaque and was awarded his 50<sup>th</sup> merit mark at

the 1993 Annual USPS Meeting where he was named "man for all seasons." Harold Walker died in 1994.

Finding appropriate facilities for meetings, classes, and social functions was a continuing problem. Over time, the Squadron met in the Holiday Inn, Punta Gorda Elks Club, Isles Yacht Club, Italian American Club, Punta Gorda Boat Club, Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club, Colony Point Community Center, Charlotte County Cultural Center, First Federal Savings and Loan, Laishley Park, Wellness Center, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, and Bayfront Center. As a result, members began talking about establishing a Headquarters Building in 1972. The search for a permanent facility went on for many years leading to the 1987 acquisition of the Bermont Road property. Lacking enough funds, members were forced to put the property up for sale in 1992. The sale was completed in 1999. (See article *Our Treasury's Pot Of Gold*)

There were a number of things that occurred during the PRPS' history that may be of interest to the reader. A few are described below.

On January 23, 1973, the ExCom voted to invite wives to the next general membership meeting.

In May 7, 1974, a Boating Shelf was set up at the Punta Gorda Public Library which was to hold PRPS materials. At the same meeting, the ExCom approved the formation of a women's auxiliary.

A PRPS roster was to be buried in the Time Capsule at the Punta Gorda Municipal Auditorium to be opened in 2077, according to the report at the March 1, 1977 Ex- Com meeting.

A motion was approved at the May 3, 1974, meeting to allow women to buy white and black name tags similar to those worn by the men.

On May 3, 1977, the ExCom voted to invite wives to attend regular membership meetings as guests. Women could obtain certificates in the Squadron even if they were not related to a Squadron member in 1978. The retention of members has been an ongoing problem with the PRPS. For example, in 1988, 65 new members were gained but 36 old members were lost. The Squadron tried several remedies such as special seating arrangements at meetings and orientation programs to solve this problem. In 1992, the ExCom approved the formation of the Silver Trident Association pending approval of the National and District. The organization consists of Past Commanders and serves as an advisory body to the Commander. It also functions as a social group to maintain personal relations among the Past Commanders. In early 2001, the Silver Tridents volunteered to be official greeters at all functions.

One of the most important programs of the PRPS is the Adopt-a-Chart Program which began in July 1998. The PRPS was asked by the National Ocean Service (NOS), which is a specific agency of the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), to commit resources to the reporting on anomalies in the nautical chart 11426. The chart covers Estero Bay to Lemon Bay. This was narrowed to include the area enclosed within Charlotte County and the Intracoastal Waterway from Boca Grande to just past Englewood. The work is done primarily on the water, exhaustively and systematically evaluating the entire assigned chart area for information that is no longer accurate as well as new features that need to be charted to promote safe navigation. Keeping charts up to date is of prime importance to boaters and is not a new activity for the PRPS, which has been doing this kind of work for many years under the Cooperative Charting Program, initiated in 1963. This program is a joint venture between the USPS and NOAA and is a public service of the USPS that allows members to use skills learned in their education courses.

The Vessel Safety Check (VSC) began in 2001 in cooperation with the USCG Auxiliary. Certified PRPS examiners conduct courtesy exams of boats in the Punta Gorda/Port Charlotte area.

Over the years, the PRPS has made significant contributions to the community. Among these were the Civil Air Patrol, the Elks Club Americanism Parade, C.A.R.E., Christmas Parades, Charlotte County Marine Advisory Board, Salvation Army, collection of food and blankets for the homeless, and Safe Boating Week participation. The 1996 Squadron Christmas tree won a Blue Ribbon for the best large traditional tree at the Symphony of Trees at the Town Center Mall and sold for \$275.

Finally, the PRPS provides many opportunities for its members to socialize at picnics, cruises, and other functions. Member involvement is a priority and may solve the member retention problem that has existed throughout its history

#### Webmaster's Note:

On August 13, 2004, a Category 4 hurricane named Charley came ashore at North Captiva Island and tracked North Easterly up Charlotte Harbor. The eye of the storm passed over the City of Punta Gorda causing major damage to the Bay Front Center where the Peace River class room is located. It was not until April 2006 that the class room was repaired by the City. In the mean time classes were held in instructor's homes, rented space in churches, donated conference rooms and starting in the fall of 2005, at the Punta Gorda Boat Club. General membership meetings were held at various locations throughout Charlotte County because the usual meeting place at the Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club was destroyed. Membership meetings resumed at the yacht club in March 2006.