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Alaska Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year

Feature by PA1 Kurt Fredrickson

Some would say that in life there is a recipe for success. But for the 2006 Alaskan Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year, this metaphor rings true as her accomplishments can be traced to her lifelong love of cooking. For her, serving goes beyond food and requires attention to the elements that make up the human recipe. It is for this reason that Petty Officer 1st Class Andrea Bisignani has been named the 2006 Alaskan Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year.



KODIAK, Alaska – Petty Officer 1st Class Andrea Bisignani stands in the galley of the Coast Guard Cutter SPAR Feb. 16, 2007. Bisignani was named the 2006 Alaskan Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year for her actions which exemplify the Coast Guard core values of honor respect and devotion to duty. USCG photo by PA1 Kurt Fredrickson.

Bisignani is a food service specialist aboard the Coast Guard Cutter SPAR, a 225-foot oceangoing buoy tender homeported in Kodiak, Alaska. Although she has only been on the cutter since June 2006, her accomplishments have had an impact on the efficiency of the cutter's galley, the morale of the crew, and the Kodiak community.

Bisignani joined the Coast Guard in 1994, at the age of 19. After graduating from Del Norte High School in her hometown of Albuquerque, N.M., she attended one year of college where she made the decision to join the Coast Guard.

Bisignani quickly fell into the role of mess cook at her first duty station aboard the 180-foot, Coast Guard Cutter Madrona in Charleston, S.C. After 10 months aboard the cutter, Bisignani's culinary journey began as she was sent off to school to become a food service specialist. Her first duty station as a cook was at Loran Station Port Clarence Alaska, just 85 miles from the Arctic Circle on the Seward Peninsula.

After cutting her teeth in the remote north of Alaska, Bisignani was transferred to the opposite end of the country to Coast Guard Group Portland, Maine where she continued to hone her professional skills. Bisignani was then given the chance to excel when she received orders to Washington, D.C., to cook for the Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard. After two years she was reassigned to cook for the Commandant of the Coast Guard at Coast Guard Headquarters.

“That’s when I realized that it’s really what I wanted to do and that I would be good at it,” she explained. “That was the one moment that did everything in my career.

After spending 5 years in Washington, where she earned her associates degree in culinary arts, Bisignani was reassigned to the Coast Guard Cutter James Rankin, in Baltimore, Md. In June 2006, Bisignani transferred to her current duty station aboard the SPAR. While Bisignani has served 12 years on active duty, it has been her actions in the past year that earned her the award of the 2006 Alaskan Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year.



KODIAK, Alaska – Petty Officer 1st Class Andrea Bisignani receives an honorary citation from Alaska state Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux during the annual Kodiak Crab Festival Saturday. The citation recognizes Bisignani as the 2006 Alaskan Coast Guard Enlisted Person of the Year. Bisignani is joined by Capt. Mark Carmel, right, Integrated Support Command Kodiak commanding officer, and Lt.j.g. Jason Alicea, left, Coast Guard Crab Festival coordinator for 2007. USCG photo by PA1 Kurt Fredrickson.

In June 2006, while aboard the James Rankin, she was selected as the Coast Guard’s Food Service Specialist of the Year. She also led the cutter’s galley to win Coast Guard Dining Facility of the year in the small afloat category.

After reporting to the SPAR, Bisignani took over the galley and improved its efficiency through training and budgeting. She continues to oversee the daily operation of the galley as the food service officer on the cutter. She has also taken an active role in the professional development of the three junior food service specialists aboard the SPAR, resulting in an improved menu and overall improved operation of the ship.

“My outlook has always been that you want people to want to eat, and to do that you have to have good food,” said Bisignani. “By providing that you’re creating high morale and people are now looking forward to something.”

Outside the galley, Bisignani serves as master-at-arms and in-port command duty officer. She is noted in the award for constantly trying to improve the quality of life aboard the SPAR, and is the first to bring issues to the attention of the command. However, her attention to the needs of other stretches beyond the SPAR.

After an accident aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Healy in 2006, where two divers lost their lives, she volunteered to take over for the Healy’s food service personnel to give them time to regroup after their loss. She has also assisted other cutters with ties to Kodiak. She helped the recently decommissioned Cutter Storis establish a web based stores account and worked with the Cutter Munro, which is relocating to Kodiak from its current homeport of Alameda, Calif.

“I always like to get involved, I always like to do things,” Bisignani explained. “One thing about me that I think makes me so different, is that I am extremely persistent in trying to get a positive outcome on something.”

In 2006, she was a key player in the unit morale program, hosting events such as cake decorating classes, cooking Thanksgiving dinner, and organizing a holiday party for more than 80 crew members and their family.

What time and effort Bisignani has left after her other commitments has gone to the Kodiak community. Whether meeting with local Girl Scout troops or organizing the collection of toys for the Toys for Tots Foundation, Bisignani has presented honor, respect, and devotion to duty throughout her professional and personal action.

Bisignani lives in Kodiak with her husband and four year old son. The 2006 Alaskan Enlisted Person of the Year award recognizes superior performance of duty as demonstrated by individual's actions. Awardees also exemplify the Coast Guard core values of honor respect and devotion to duty.

"I just do my job and I don't do my job half heartedly," she said. "I truly, truly enjoy cooking and I can't imagine not being able to do that."

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