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Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing

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Overboard Boater Rescued off California Coast AFRAS (Association For Rescue At Sea) Honors C-PORT Member with Lifesaving Award



C-PORT (Conference of Professional Operators for Response Towing) and AFRAS (Association For Rescue At Sea) celebrated and presented its distinguished lifesaving award at the 31st C-PORT Conference and Membership Meeting held on January 16 at the Wyndham Grand, Jupiter FL. Presenting the award on behalf of AFRAS was Mr. Charles "Skip" Bowen, Master Chief USCG (retired), to Captain Nathan Lins, Cat Tow Inc./ TowBoatU.S. Catalina.

This is the eighth year that AFRAS presented this prestigious award to a C-PORT member. In 2010, AFRAS had expressed a desire to establish a program, in cooperation with C-PORT, to annually recognize a deserving member of C-PORT that has shown exceptional skill and determination to save lives during a rescue incident in the maritime environment. The Award is to be conferred on an individual or group of individuals who perform exceptional acts in attempting to save life in the maritime environment. Instances where the rescuer places their own life at risk were given highest consideration. John Ward, C-PORT chairman, stated, "This is what our guys do, everyday. They serve the boaters. It's an honor to have them recognized for their lifesaving efforts."

On September 11, 2017, Captain Nathan Lins of TowBoatU.S. Catalina was towing a disabled vessel when he heard a MayDay call come over the radio for that someone had fallen overboard. Lins grabbed his binoculars and turned on his directional finder which showed a strong signal in the direction of a sailing vessel he could see about 4 miles away. They were in the middle of nowhere, so Lins felt confident that was the boat making the distress call. He could tell it was serious by the panic in the woman's voice. Lins told the passengers on his tow what was happening, and with their permission, disengaged the tow and proceeded to the distressed vessel. Lins was concerned, as the vessel reporting the man overboard had not stopped moving or alter its course, leaving him believing the persons onboard did not know how to operate the boat.

Lins caught up to the sailboat and was told that a man had fallen overboard without a life jacket, and the crew struggled to get the boat off of autopilot and now they were disoriented and unsure where the person had fallen overboard. Luckily the woman had taken a picture of the GPS when the man fell overboard. Using the GPS coordinates, Lins ascertained he fell overboard about one and a half miles from their current position and in rough seas. Lins climbed to his tower and began his search, combing the area and using binoculars to hunt for the man in the water. It was blowing 15 knots making it very choppy, and the water temperature was about 71 degrees creating an immediate concern of hypothermia. Lins had traveled about a mile when spotted the man's head, barely above water. Lins estimated the man had been in the water at least 45 minutes and was struggling to survive. It was very rough and waves were crashing over his head. Lins maneuvered his vessel to within 10 feet of the man, and threw him a floatation device. It landed near his chin and the man grabbed it and held on to it desperately, but was too tired to swim that short distance. Lins called out to the man to hold on, and skillfully maneuvered closer. Standing on his swim platform, Lins pulled the man onboard. The man was exhausted and of no help in getting himself out of the water. With the man safely onboard, Lins notified US Coast Guard and returned the man to his sailboat. With the sea state, it took skillful



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maneuvering to get the vessels together to make a safe transfer. Once safe, the man was able to step off onto his sailboat without issue. Lins returned the 4 miles to where he had released his original tow and continued on his way.

In the gentleman's own words: "As the boat moved farther and farther away I realized two frightening things chasing it was impossible and also what a small speck hidden by swells I was becoming. At this point preparing for death consumed my every thought. As the sailboat got smaller and smaller I was constantly scanning the horizon for other boats. Not a single vessel. This continued for 20 minutes or so until I saw what looked to be some sort of official vessel heading towards our sailboat. The amazing part was that his direction wasn't towards me but towards where the current was taking me. There was a thought that maybe he wasn't aware of even a man overboard but either way we were set to cross paths. This I knew was my last hope of rescue. As he approached I gave all efforts to be noticed but I could see it wasn't working. He drew closer and still no reaction. Panic was beginning to grow again and hope was fading. I was about 30 yards away off of his port side as he was about to pass. Then at the last moment the boat turned towards me but I was still in disbelief that he saw me. It wasn't till he looked over the side to adjust steering not to run me over that I was overwhelmed with what just happened. He pulled up next to me, very calm and professional, and I was like a cat that just got thrown in a bathtub. I couldn't thank him enough but I didn't want to annoy him either. The truth is I don't know how to thank him. Captain Nathan saved my life."

C-PORT was founded in 1986 to act as a liaison between the marine assistance industry and public agencies and organizations involved with boating safety, marine assistance, marine salvage and other marine-related operations. Our members are dedicated to providing prompt, professional and timely assistance to all boaters and to actively partner and cooperate with local law enforcement and U.S. Coast Guard. For more information, contact C-PORT at (954) 261-2012 or visit www.cport.us.