

A new American

Mirko Latkovic emigrated from Montenegro to Port Aransas

**By Dan Parker
South Jetty Reporter**
Mirko Latkovic loves the Fourth of July holiday. "I like how the people come from everywhere, share their time, talk and meet together," he said.

But Latkovic, a Port Aransas resident since 2002, has another reason for adoring Independence Day, and it has nothing to do with fireworks. He became an American citizen this year.

Latkovic grew up in Montenegro, part of the former Yugoslavia. His hometown is Kotor, a picturesque village on the edge of the Adriatic Sea. It still holds a place in his heart.

"The city is built on 15th century mahogany (foundations)," Latkovic said. "It's so historical. And I have so many friends there. We live ... like big family."

Latkovic grew up to be a seaman, like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather before him. In his early 20s, he served a couple years in the Yugoslavian navy, working as a diesel mechanic. He also worked in a factory, painting Navy boats and trucks.

Latkovic first visited the United States in 1987, while working aboard a cargo ship that stopped off at Houston and Corpus Christi. From 1991 to 2001, he worked as an engine

foreman and plumber on a number of cruise ships that made stops at various locations along the East Coast. Spending up to two weeks at a time on shore, he got more and more glimpses of the United States, met many Americans and developed a love for America.

This country, I really like.

MIRKO LATKOVIC
NEW U.S. CITIZEN

Eight years ago, Latkovic came to Port Aransas for the first time, working as an engine foreman aboard the Texas Treasure casino gambling ship that was headquartered at Harbor Island. He later got a job as a maintenance mechanic at the ferries here in town.

He met his wife, Christine Ritter, while living in Port Aransas. They married on Nov. 18, 2002.

Fifteen-year-old Zorica, Latkovic's daughter from a previous marriage, is a student at Port Aransas High School. Her twin brother, Zoran, lives with his mother in Montenegro.

Latkovic said he decided

to work toward becoming an American citizen simply because he has become so fond of the United States and its people.

"This country, I really like because everybody who wants to work, he can get a job," he said. "I really like that opportunity."

He added, "I love the (American) people because these people love me. ... And I see these people have heart, something that's really open."

Latkovic studied U.S. history, laws and culture, using a book and CD provided by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. A seaman to the core, he said his favorite part was reading about the ships that brought the Pilgrims to America.

After passing an INS test in January, Latkovic took the oath of citizenship at the federal courthouse in Corpus Christi, along with dozens of other emigrants from about 35 different countries, on May 15.

On April 17, Port Aransas Mayor Claude Brown issued a proclamation honoring Latkovic for, among other things, being "an example of a model citizen, contributing to community projects, being a good neighbor and setting an example for others to follow," according to the printed proclamation. (Latkovic has a framed copy of the proclamation



Flag waver

STAFF PHOTO BY DAN PARKER

Mirko Latkovic poses recently for a photo portrait in front of his Mercer Street home in Port Aransas.

at home.) That same day, Latkovic led the Port Aransas City Council in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at the

council's meeting.

Asked recently how it felt to become an American, Latkovic said, "Like you

float on the sea for 26 days, and then you see a boat, and people on it give you a hand and lift you up."



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN PARKER

A seaman to the core

Mirko Latkovic cruises on June 14 through the Aransas Pass, near Ancel Brundrett Pier, in his 26-foot vessel, a former U.S. Navy motor whaleboat

he bought. A fourth-generation seaman, Latkovic enjoys diving and spearfishing from the boat, which he named Sea Wolf.



A mayor's proclamation

Port Aransas Mayor Claude Brown issued a proclamation on April 17 honoring Latkovic.



COURTESY PHOTO

In the Yugoslavian Navy

Second from left, Latkovic poses for a photo with fellow sailors during his time serving in the Yugoslavian navy in the 1980s.



COURTESY PHOTO

In Montenegro

Latkovic and his wife, Christine Ritter, pose for a photo while visiting his hometown of Kotor, a small town in Montenegro, on the Adriatic Sea.