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Civil Air Patrol: Cadets committed to volunteer program

By Shar Porier Herald/Review

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SIERRA VISTA — "These kids are nothing like I've seen before. They're disciplined and respectful. I'm very proud of these cadets. They're outstanding."

That's what Deputy Commander of Cadets Corbet Reece had to say about the 29 teenagers enrolled in the cadet program of Cochise Composite Squadron 107 of the Civil Air Patrol.

"I think they're more active than the adults in the Civil Air Patrol. They have been committed since they came on board," he said.

The Civil Air Patrol, a volunteer nonprofit organization, falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Air Force which offers a small amount of funding through Wing Command in Phoenix for operations of the squadron, he said. The squadron has 57 members. While some of the adults have formal flying experience through stints in the military, many members today join following their kids.

Reece is one of those parents. He followed his son Wheeler, now 17, into the squadron four years ago.

Wheeler Reece, like many of the cadets, is home schooled. Parents who home school their children appreciate the core values of the cadet program, added Corbet Reece.

Wheeler has not decided just what he wants to study in college, or if he wants to serve in the military.

"I'm more into the technology stuff," Wheeler said. "I'm considering the Air Force Academy, but I just don't know what I want to do right now. What I like about the program is that you develop leadership skills. I see this as a good way to prepare for any career in industry. I also like to help the other cadets develop their skills."

A cadet who has a plan for the future is Samantha "Sam" McNeil. The 15-year-old home schooler has set her sights on the cockpit of a jet fighter sporting the Air Force insignia.

Squadron Commander Rob Harnage has nothing but good things to say about his "best pilot."

"She is a natural-born pilot who handles the plane better than any other cadet," Harnage said.

"I jumped at the chance to fly and I love the whole military thing. This is an awesome opportunity for teenagers to set goals for themselves," she said.

Cadet Chief Master Sgt. Anthony Petonic is looking forward to serving in the Marine Corps and saw the program as a way to build his character along with his resume. At 15 years old, he will be taking over leadership of the cadet program from Reece as the cadet commander.

Petonic went through the 10-day "basic training" course that is optional for cadets. It's there that the rules of command and self-discipline are instilled. Cadets are much like their counterparts in the ROTC as far as discipline goes, but what they get in CAP cadets is the chance to be airborne and put some time in as pilots of the squadron's Cessna. Skills are developed so that in case of an emergency, such as a search and rescue, the cadets can help the CAP pilots and spotters from the ground.

Corbet Reece said, "We've had him training for this for years."

Petonic plans to attend college prior to entering the Marines, though he's not sure what he wants to major in just now.

Fourteen-year-old Cadet Dominic Epps is a freshman at Buena High School. He just joined at the beginning of the year after his dad Alex Epps brought home a brochure on CAP.

"You can do things in this program that you would never be able to do anyplace else," Dominic said.

He also plans to fly for the Air Force and sees himself piloting a C-130, a workhorse plane used for a variety of purposes from transport to aerial firefighting missions.

Dominic has learned the sense of camaraderie and said, "We're all a band of brothers."

High school subjects that comes in handy for flying are mathematics and algebra, they all agreed.

Wheeler Reece, who has accepted compiling a cadets sergeants school for southeast Arizona, added, "There's a competitiveness, but it's all meant to help you improve."

In addition to the weekly Thursday night meetings, the cadets engage in fundraising to pay for flight time and needed equipment to help them do a better job. They will accept donations for work done once Harnage and Corbet Reece make sure it is something the cadets can do. The squadron has been looking for computers and a projector to help enhance lessons to fully engage the cadets and adults. There are many things the squadron could use, including funds.

Harnage complimented his cadets, "I believe strongly in what CAP has to offer the young people in our community. I can tell you that our group of teenagers truly are tomorrow's leaders."

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Someone Interested wrote on Jun 29, 2009 7:21 AM: "I would like to know how I could get more information so that I could get my daughter involved in this program. EDITOR'S NOTE: Contact information was printed in the newspaper, but left out of the online version. You can reach Corbet Reece at 520-591-4761 or Rob Harnage at 520-456-6889. "

Denice Jung wrote on Jun 29, 2009 7:10 AM: "Thanks to the Civil Air Patrol for giving these young adults such an opportunity! Go Dominic! "

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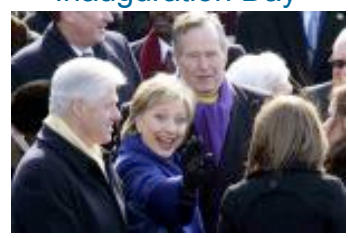
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