

At Memorial Middle School, CAP cadets learning core values

Sentinel & Enterprise
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Updated: 2017-12-26 04:51:48.116423

By Chad Garner

Special to the Sentinel

FITCHBURG -- There's no substitute for possessing strong life skills like responsibility, discipline, organization and community service.

At Memorial Middle School in Fitchburg, students who are members of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) program -- an auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force -- are learning core values that they can use for the rest of their lives.

"They get exposed to a lot of experiences that they wouldn't otherwise get," Memorial psychologist Beth Foley said. "That's more what I'm looking for is them to broaden their horizons and show them what others things are out there. There's a whole wide world out there of things to do and be."

Jailene Poladian, an eighth-grade student at Memorial, is one of approximately nine cadets in the program, which officially started in January. Cadets nationwide range in ages 11 through 22.

"We have four core values and they are respect, integrity, excellence in all we do and volunteer service," Poladian said. "In the Civic Air Patrol you have to follow all four to stay because those are the core values. You have to put others before yourself."

Poladian's younger brother, Lucas, who is in the fifth grade, is also a member of the CAP.

"My older brother (Nick) is in the Army and he inspired me," Jailene said.

Fifth-grader Nicco Cosme joined the program five weeks ago with one long-term goal in mind.

"I want to be in the Air Force when I grow up," Cosme said.

Under the watchful eye of teacher Jeff Whittemore, the group meets every Tuesday at the school. The list of activities at various meetings include: drill, rocketry, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) physical training and book testing, says Foley.

"Our thought process was giving them something to do after school that could be a benefit for them for their life and not for just this year or next year," Foley said.

Some of the cadets have even had the opportunity to fly an aircraft.

Obviously, flying has been a memorable experience to some of these local students.

"They loved it," Foley said. "They do the takeoff and the landing with the pilot beside them. They do the whole thing, and they fly for an hour every time they go up. Some of our cadets have gone up three or four times and some are gearing up for their first one."

Jailene says she's flown three times, while Autumn Hill -- a seventh-grader -- has grown accustomed to flying at an early age since her father works at the Fitchburg Airport.

"It feels like you have no gravity," Hill explained. "I used to be scared of heights until I went in the airplane and then it wasn't scary. When you're over the ocean, it's really fun because if you're lucky enough, you get to see fish in the ocean. It's an awesome experience to go flying."

Learning about discipline in the program is also a great thing, says Foley.

"If they don't play a sport, there's really no means to learn that if they don't learn it at home," said Foley, adding that respect and responsibility are also key core values that are taught in the program. "A lot of these kids were like, 'I can't do anything; I can't be anything.' And we were like, 'Yes, you can.'"

Recently, Fitchburg cadets also assisted in the "Wreaths Across America" -- presented by the Worcester Cadet Squadron Civil Air Patrol -- to honor the memory of deceased veterans.

"It's an honor to do this," Jailene said. "It's like saying thank you to them for giving their lives for us."

The CAP is one of several after-school programs that is funded by money raised at the Fitchburg Public Schools' annual Gala. This year's Gala will take place on May 5 at Fitchburg High School.

Chad Garner is the Fitchburg School District's Family and Community Partnership Champion.

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