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Navy Sea Cadet Corps: Alternative to violence

T.R. Shaw Jr.

The recent series on violence in our community was interesting and informative. From reading the features, it's apparent young people today face many challenges: lack of opportunity, lack of adult and parental role models and many other distractions preventing them from becoming responsible adults and good citizens.

One little known organization in our community is making a big difference for many young people and is producing dramatic results.

The U. S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps was established in Battle Creek nearly 10 years ago and has been guiding young Americans in the right direction in a positive and drug-free environment. Every member of the corps will also tell you, it's just plain fun!

The Naval Sea Cadet Corps (NSCC) is for American youth ages 11-17 who desire to learn about the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines. Sea Cadets are authorized by the secretary of the Navy to wear Navy uniforms appropriately marked with the Sea Cadet Corps insignia. Once they are admitted to the program, they attend a two-week boot camp at Great Lakes Training Center in Illinois and train alongside actual Navy recruits. They drill once a month alongside Navy Reservists, perform civic and ceremonial duties, and have opportunities to learn about and explore the sea services. Many of them get to spend time aboard Navy ships and Coast Guard cutters as well as time at other military installations, including Navy air stations where they will get an opportunity to fly in military aircraft. Cadets also have an opportunity for foreign exchange and travel overseas to spend time with cadets in allied countries.

The objectives of the Sea Cadet program are to introduce youth to naval life, to develop in them a sense of pride, patriotism, courage and self-reliance, and to maintain an environment free of drugs and gangs. The corps promotes scholarship, education and being a leader in school. The program is a line item in the Department of Defense budget and is administered by the Navy League of the United States. Navy League Councils are the primary sponsor of many units, such as the Windward Division here in Battle Creek. Locally, veterans organizations or service clubs may also provide local sponsorship. Michigan is currently home to 15 Sea Cadet units. The newest unit is about to be commissioned in St. Joseph and will be sponsored by the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph Rotary Club.

By participating in the Sea Cadet Corps, students are eligible to enlist in any branch of the military at a higher pay grade upon graduation from high school. They are eligible for ROTC scholarships if they attend college and have an admission advantage at United States service and maritime academies.

Several alumni of the Battle Creek's Windward Division are presently attending the U. S. Naval Academy, West Point, U. S. Air Force Academy and the Citadel or are serving in the military. Many others are succeeding in college or working in skilled trades with a bright future ahead of them. One graduate who enlisted in the Army earned the Bronze Star in combat in Iraq within a year of graduating from high school. She credited the leadership skills and dedication to duty she learned in the Sea Cadets for her courage in the face of the enemy fire.

The program may not appeal to all young people, but those who want a challenge and better alternatives to negative peer pressure should consider joining the Sea Cadet Corps. Many teens today just need a sense of direction and sense of purpose. They need to do something rewarding and something beyond themselves. The Sea Cadet Corps is an outstanding program and wonderful alternative. I've seen some of the results and it can be a life-changing experience - for the better.

Information on the Sea Cadet program can be found at [www.seacadets.org](http://www.seacadets.org). The links will take you to the local units. Whether you are a student, parent, grandparent or educator, you should consider learning more about this character-building institution. If you are an adult who wants to become involved, there is always a need for adult leaders and role models in the organization. You may want to consider becoming a cadet corps officer yourself. You need not be a veteran, but many veterans bring their knowledge and expertise to the program.

America has always been a seafaring nation and our future security is in our maritime strength, both military and civilian. Our future is also vested in the next generation of young people. We owe it to them to give them every advantage possible.

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