



## **Kannapolis boy gets look at Navy life**

By Amy Matzke

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With summer vacation nearing an end, many 12-year-olds are getting in as much swimming, playing, and goofing off as possible before school starts.

Not Chantz Sellers.

Sellers spent nine days in boot camp in Fort Jackson, S.C., and will leave for leadership training school in Norfolk, Va., in early August.

Sellers is part of the Naval Sea Cadet Corps, a group for youth between ages 13 and 17 to learn about the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

Although Sellers is still 12 years old, Cmdr. Mark Schroeder, ret. Navy, and director of the Sea Cadets' Charlotte division, promoted Sellers during the summer from the Navy League Cadets so he could attend the summer training.

"He is probably young, but I looked at him and looked at his maturity and thought he could succeed in training, and he did," Schroeder said. "He is early, but I use my judgment whether they can handle the training."

At boot camp, the cadets learned what they needed for basic military training, Sellers said.

"We learned how to march, leadership and seamanship," Sellers said. "They taught us about gang violence, drugs - not just military, but what we need to know in the real world."

The program is a lot like what a recruit going into the Navy as an adult would encounter, Schroeder said.

"It's similar, but its not that intense, but they try to give them a flavor of what they would see in the military if they were to enlist," Schroeder said. "Since they are teenagers rather than older kids, they try to make it close with some restrictions ... no harassment, send them to a lot of classroom time, and the emphasis was on leadership."

Sellers, who will start the eighth grade at Kannapolis Middle this year, started in the program after his father, Ken, who is also retired Navy, found the program online.

Chantz had wanted to find something military-related, because he was interested in it, he said, and this seemed like the right program. He joined in September 2006.

Without the outside training, the Sea Cadets meet one weekend a month for drill, where they spend eight hours each day in classroom instruction, marching, and occasional field trips, Schroeder said.

When he's not drilling or attending training, Sellers has also earned a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, and plays basketball in the Winecoff League, baseball in the Dixie Youth League, football for Kannapolis Middle, skateboards, and plays trumpet in the school's band.

The sports and Tae Kwon Do have helped some with the Sea Cadets, Chantz said.

"We don't play any sports at Sea Cadets, but it helps with endurance and the hand-to-hand combat," Chantz said.

He said it's too far away to know if he will join the Navy once he is old enough, but he said he might want to apply to the U.S. Naval Academy for college.

Chantz said he is excited to do more training as he gets older with Sea Cadets, including submarine school, aviation training, and Navy Seal training.

Participation in the Sea Cadets would put Sellers about 18 months ahead of someone enlisting as an adult in rank and knowledge, Schroeder said, and can help him get scholarships for college.

"At his age, you don't find this very often," Ken Sellers said proudly. "I've seen a change in him. The maturity factor comes in."

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