



## Sea Cadets pass in review

**Juli Mijares**

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Hard work, dedication, discipline and some fun have all paid off for a group of students learning what it's like to serve in the armed forces.

Members of Diablo Squadron, a local unit with the Naval Sea Cadet Corps out of Concord Naval Weapons Station, were recently recognized during a Pass in Review ceremony for their skills in knot tying, marching, physical fitness, academics, team building and leadership. It was the culmination of a weekend spent competing against 17 units from central and Northern California.

The locals earned first place in physical fitness and color guard, and second place in attendance, academics, marching and personnel. Brittany Davis won the Piping Award, William Calderon won Cadet of the Year (both are from Brentwood) and Tanner Morgan of Antioch won the Presidential Physical Fitness award.

The annual event isn't merely a competition; it's a way for cadets who've met each other at other training sessions to reconnect. Team building and learning to work together as a unit is vital to the competition and the Corps.

"It's an awesome program; it supersedes any youth-involved organization out there," said parent volunteer Dianna Gonsalves of Brentwood. "It's right up there with a Police Explorer Post, Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.

"It really puts you to the test. You have to have responsibility."

The Naval Sea Cadet Corps for American youth is a voluntary organization established in 1958 by the Navy League of the United States at the request of the Department of the Navy. Its mission is to provide a drug- and alcohol-free environment in which kids can learn patriotism, teamwork, courage, self-reliance and leadership, and broaden their experiences through hands-on training.

The Corps accepts young people ages 13 to 17 who want to learn about the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marine. Participants go through boot camp, a two-week version of the Navy's extensive boot camp, and then drill weekly or monthly, depending on their unit or squadron. In the process, they learn military protocol, rank, naval history, leadership, career opportunities and other aspects of military life. They also work on community service projects and take field trips to naval installations and ships.

While they are drilling, cadets are expected to conduct themselves as though they were on active military duty. They advance in rank, meet the responsibilities that go with their rank, and earn ribbons and medals. They must observe the uniform standards (they wear authentic Navy uniforms), salute superiors and address them correctly. The cadet units are led by active duty, retired and reserve personnel, along with civilian volunteers.

Lt. Cmdr. Laneya Littrell has been a volunteer with the organization for more than 10 years. She said the program's leaders work to make it fun for the kids, but that they take seriously the business of teaching cadets about the Navy. "It's a good head start if the kids want to go to the academies," Littrell said, referring to institutions such as the Naval Academy in Annapolis.

"They learn a lot and get to do things other kids don't get to do. You have to have a certain amount of



Diablo Squadron, a local unit with the Naval Sea Cadet Corps out of Concord Naval Weapons Station, marches to its position during its recent Pass in Review ceremony.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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discipline, especially if you're going into the military."

Training opportunities are also abundant. Advanced training schools include everything from air traffic control to Seal Team training, scuba school and firefighting. The schools let the kids test their mettle and learn what's involved in a career of military service.

Navy League Cadets level is for boys and girls ages 11 to 13 who are interested in America's seagoing services. It introduces them to military life, teaches them seamanship, discipline and military protocol, and prepares them for advancement to the Sea Cadet level.

Time served in the Sea Cadets counts when a cadet joins the Navy, allowing entry at a higher rank and conferring all the privileges and responsibilities of that rank.

Among the Sea Cadet students from East County is Mitchel Hammett, 16, of Brentwood. Although he's been in the program for only a few months, Hammett is already seeing the benefits of joining the Sea Cadet Corps. He plans to join the Navy after graduating from high school and wants to train in damage control and firefighting for submarines.

"I will almost be guaranteed a job when I retire from the Navy," said Hammett, who plans to join the Navy when he graduates from high school. "People usually will hire someone with a military background before someone who is just out of school."

More youth and adult leaders are needed for the Diablo Squadron program. For more information on the Sea Cadet Corps or to find a local unit, visit [www.seacadets.org/resources](http://www.seacadets.org/resources).