
Posted on Mon, Jun. 05, 2006

Program draws some to Navy life

Teenage cadets learn and earn credit toward future military service

JOHN MYERS
Duluth News Tribune

Davan Scott grew up on the hill overlooking the Duluth harbor, and he says that's why water and boats have always had an allure.

"I'd watch the boats come and go and I knew I wanted to do something around water," Scott said Sunday.

That's why he joined the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps four years ago, and that's why he's joining the Navy this summer.

"I'm going to try for the SEALs," said Scott, who turns 19 next week. "The cadets helped me figure this out."

Scott has been a member of the Twin Ports chapter of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps since it formed nearly four years ago. The program is open to girls and boys ages 13 to 18. Related programs include adult volunteer officers and a Navy League cadet corps for ages 11 to 13.

On Sunday, Scott and other local cadets were helping prepare the retired Coast Guard cutter Sundew for its summer tour season. The cadets spent Saturday night on the Sundew and incorporated their volunteer cleanup efforts with hands-on training. They also hold occasional drills on the cutter.

The four cadets aboard were storing and coiling lines, polishing brass fixtures and checking pumps to make sure the former buoy tender is shipshape. It helps the Sundew's owners, the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center, and it helps the cadets learn the difference between aft and amidships.

The duty, their grades and ranks, the uniforms, even the lingo is near-real Navy.

"We can do things on board that are pretty much the same as what happens on an active-duty ship," said Andrew Ostapenko of Duluth, an adult Sea Cadets volunteer officer.

Scott, a 2005 Duluth Central High School graduate, used his experiences as a cadet to help him decide his future. Cadets meet once a month to drill alongside the Navy reservists in Duluth. They also go to boot camp their first summer as a cadet and to training camps for two weeks each year.

Camp can mean training alongside Seabees construction crews, medical corpsmen, SEALs demolition units or even time on an aircraft carrier.

"The cadets are a great way to travel and meet people and test out what you want to do," Scott said.

Not all cadets are gung-ho about joining the military. Jeremie Pawlowicz of Duluth, 19, has enjoyed his years in the cadets. But, unlike Scott, he has decided to skip active-duty Navy or Coast Guard and go to college.

"It's been fun, but I'm not sure it's what I want to do," he said.

But, if cadets do sign on with Uncle Sam, they get credit for their time and experiences, entering the service at a higher grade and pay. There are also college scholarships for qualifying cadets.

"And you go in knowing a few things," Scott said. "It's a definite advantage. And it's been fun."

