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Youth learn nautical ropes through Sea Cadets program

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As water gushed from the leaking pipe, officers shouted warnings on the state of the sinking ship over shoulders of cadets who scrambled to close the flood.

Not yet out of high school, the cadets were inexperienced and performing the patch took longer than expected.

Fortunately, the exercise was performed on safe, dry land during Petty Officer Leadership Academy (POLA), hosted by the Thomas Jefferson Division of the United States Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

The sea cadet program gives youth, aged 13 to 18, the chance to learn what a career in the Navy it is all about with training that includes exercises in the classroom, team building, trust, management and responsibility.

Based in Jefferson City, participants of the two-week-long training graduated Saturday with experiences many hope to use for real.

Jaella Humphrey, 15, Hermann, stood straight-backed and spoke with confidence of her desire to be an engine mechanic. She had no doubts about her future in the Navy. It's something she wanted since she was 9.

"I'm an E-3 right now and I want to be prepared for when I make petty officer," she said. "This is the only thing I have ever thought of doing. ... I'm not interested in anything else."

Training is designed to develop leaders within the Sea Cadet Corps and society.

Bruce Battye, 15, Jefferson City, said his experience with naval training has made him more confident. At POLA training, he said he has learned how to lead others. He has been interested in the navy for three years.

"I had a thing for it and every time I see the Navy, I just felt like it was something I had to do," Battye said. "You get to come together as a team."

Ensign James Denning, who instructed the group in the classroom, estimates 10 percent of those who enter the navy participated in the sea cadet program.

"We hope to help them see some of the techniques they will use in leadership positions when they are in the navy because some things aren't obvious," Denning said.

The program also helps youth decide early if a Navy career is not for them which, Denning pointed out, ends up saving government money on people who enlist and then change their mind.

From Levenworth, Kan., Shawn Sivyver, 18, was quick to volunteer for assignments with an eager hand reaching high or a snapping turn towards his commander.



Riley Williams (right) looks up to the instructor as classroom studies continue in the week of Petty Officer training at Ike Skelton National Guard facility. (Julie Smith/News Tribune photo)

At a time when others his age may be sifting through college majors in an attempt trying to divine their future, Sivyer knows what he wants to do. He looks forward to joining the ROTC program at Kansas University in the fall where he will be an officer-in-training.

"I'm a very patriotic person. American means everything to me," Sivyer said. "It's like my life. It's all or nothing for me."



Team leader Nicole Harris (right), jumps right in and tells her team what to do to go about sealing the leak in the pipe. Fellow cadets are, (from left): Spencer Laughlin, Bruce Battye and Lauren Chellis. Battye is from Jefferson City, while Laughlin and Chellis are from St. Louis. Harris hails from Springfield. (Julie Smith/News Tribune photo)