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Milford retiree stays busy as Sea Cadet Corps officer

By Amelia Skimin
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On the first and third Saturday of each month, Milford resident Ed Brennan puts his Naval experience to work as he leads a group of Sea Cadets in learning about military life.

Brennan, who served in the Navy during the Korean War, first heard about the Naval Sea Cadet Corps about five years ago. For much of his adult life, Brennan had volunteered to work with young people as a scout leader; the Sea Cadet Corps, which accepts teenagers age 11 to 17, seemed like a good fit for someone with Brennan's experience.

That said, the Navy Sea Cadet Corps is by no means the boy scouts. Rather, it's designed to allow teens to experience military life without the same kind of commitment that comes with enlisting as an adult.

Brennan's unit is part of the James M. Hannan Division, and includes about 50 cadets from all over the Detroit area, including Milford and nearby South Lyon. Twice a month, they meet at the Redford Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Six Mile and Telegraph roads.

What they do varies from week to week. The cadets have classroom study on things like first aid and leadership. For training, they also get to use the Grayfox, a 120-foot former Navy torpedo vessel.

While on the Grayfox, the cadets are responsible for all facets of running a ship, from cooking and cleaning to operating the controls.

"They learn what it is to run a ship," Brennan said.

Their on-ship training includes some important safety items, like firefighting. Fires, Brennan said, are the biggest danger aboard a ship. Ship fires are usually caused by chemicals or fuel.

The Coast Guard is active with the Sea Cadet program. Cadets learn how to do things like off-load an injured person onto a Coast Guard ship. The cadets also help the Coast Guard with some of its drills. For example, cadets get to spray Coast Guard members with fire hoses during boarding drills.

"We really have a wonderful relationship the Coast Guard," said Brennan.

As part of the program, each cadet is required to attend two-week, summer recruit training at Navy or Coast Guard "boot camps." For most of Brennan's cadets, boot camp takes place at the United States Navy Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Ill.

At boot camp, the teens are pushed to their limits by drill sergeants, who keep them on the move from the time they get up to the time they go to bed.

In the summers following that first one, cadets are able to go through advanced training's in a number of different areas, from photo-journalism to cooking. According to Brennan, 35 different programs were offered this summer.

Some of Brennan's former Sea Cadets have gone on to establish military careers for themselves. Currently, he has two at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, and one at the Coast Guard Academy.

Brennan's work with the Naval Sea Cadet Corps is strictly volunteer. His pay, he said, comes from knowing he helped kids — some who come from troubled backgrounds — succeed.

"Every once and a while you get somebody who will come back and thank you," he said.

For Brennan, that's all the pay he needs.

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