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Peoria Navy Sea Cadets visit Normal to explore service careers

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NORMAL - About a dozen Peoria-area youths took turns lifting Normal Police Department's 35-pound battering ram, looked at pictures of a cache of guns confiscated in a police raid and toured the McLean County coroner's office Saturday.

Today, they will see how the Cooksville Fire Department extricates people from accidents, witness the speed of air bags deploying and man a fire hose.

While it isn't part of their regular day, it isn't too far out of the realm of what they do on some weekends.

The youths, ages 11 to 17, are members of the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet Corps' Pimiteoui Division based at the Marine Corps Reserve Center in Peoria. Sea Cadets spend weekends learning about seamanship, aviation and related careers in the military, firefighting or law enforcement.

On Saturday, they saw what it takes to be part of Normal police's 12-member emergency response unit.

"You can't break this; if you can, we'll probably hire you," Normal police Sgt. Greg Leipold said as he let the students handle body shields, battering equipment and other equipment. He also explained their level of training.

"I would have no problem letting any of our snipers shoot between my legs," he said. "They are excellent shooters."

Liepold said the snipers hit a spot the size of a nickel from 100 feet away "every time."

He showed the cadets stun guns and said, speaking from experience, "They do hurt."

He described a new stun gun model which will have a camera attached to record what the person was doing to warrant being stunned. The department doesn't have one of those yet, but he said he hopes it will soon.



Ben Teufel, corps chief with Pimiteoui Division of the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps, right, and other cadets get a closer look at emergency response unit equipment during a presentation Saturday (April 14, 2007) at the Normal Police station. (Pantagraph/CARLOS T. MIRANDA)

Cadet Ali Swan of Havana, who has been a Sea Cadet for two years, said she first got involved because she has family members in the service. Cadet Shawndra Smith, 16, said that was true for her, too.

"I joined so I would understand what they (relatives in the Navy) were talking about," Smith said. "I learned a lot of discipline and respect for those in the military."

Smith said she hopes to have a career in the military but she regrets some of areas that interest her most, such as the Navy SEALs, aren't open to women today.

"It's pretty unfair," she said.

Sea Cadet Corps Lt. Lisa Strickland, commanding officer of the Peoria-based unit, said this weekend's visits are a way for the youths to see the possibilities.

"It exposes them to what is available in additional training," she said.

One of those areas is doing police work like Liepold's. The police officer has been a member since 1999 of the emergency response unit, which trains to handle situations ranging from drug busts and violence at schools and workplaces to terrorist attacks.

Cadet Chief Ben Teurfel, 17, of Metamora has been a Sea Cadet for six years. He said he was most looking forward to the firefighting training today because the field especially interests him.

The unit will go to Cooksville because Mark McLeod, the second-in-command of the Sea Cadet unit, is a volunteer firefighter in Cooksville. He said he looks forward to showing his cadets what he does.

Sea Cadets

Who are Sea Cadets?

-- The U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps was founded in 1958 under the auspices of the U.S. Navy, but there are Sea Cadet organizations in most maritime nations.

-- The goal is to use training in seamanship, aviation and related skills to produce drug- and alcohol-free, mature adults.

-- There are two levels in the corps: Navy League Cadets for ages 11 to 13, and Naval Sea Cadets for ages 13 to 17.

-- Cadets receive training aboard Navy and Coast Guard ships and stations and wear Navy uniforms marked with corps' insignia. They earn ranks and leadership responsibilities akin to those in the Navy.

What do they do?

-- The cadets take part in a variety of training opportunities, including teamwork and leadership exercises, sporting events and physical training, ceremonial events and parades, regional and national competitions, and experiences related to numerous career fields.

-- Training typically takes place one weekend a month, and there is a two-week boot-camp-style summer training program.

SOURCES: <http://peoria-seacadets.tripod.com/id16.html>; www.seacadets.org

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