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A taste of Navy life

By **MATT COUGHLIN**
phillyBurbs.com

The Sea Cadets look and sound like Navy midshipmen.

That's what some of them hope to be someday. Others just enjoy the opportunities the youth program for 11- to 17-year-olds offers.

But it's the sense that they know what they want to do that really makes the dozens of members of the John T. Dempster Jr. Division of the Sea Cadets, made of Pennsylvania and New Jersey residents, impressive.

Andrew Hanks of Yardley just finished his junior year in high school and is in his sixth year in the Cadets division based just across the river in Lawrenceville. At a time when many teens are trying to figure out what they want to do but haven't been beyond school, work, dances and the movies, Hanks has worked on a submarine and been to officer candidate school.

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At 17, the unit's Chief David Weller has worked on naval ships and with a Navy Corpsman's unit. The New Jersey native hopes to go to medical school and sees the Cadets as a step in the right direction.

"It challenges you," David said. "You do things you never thought you'd be able to do. The intensity of it bring out sides of you you never knew you had."

Instructors said there is no obligation to join the military. Unit Cmdr. Donald Heffner said many kids might be home playing "Halo" or watching action movies, but the Sea Cadets are out running search and rescue drills and using 50-caliber machine gun simulators and urban warfare simulations.

There are several advanced training courses cadets can take that give them a leg up on their way into the service or any other aspects of life, including SEAL training, training with the JAG Corps (Judge Advocate General or military attorneys), summer positions as crewmen on a ship, flight lessons, firefighter training, engineering courses, urban combat simulations, music schools and a host of others.



All cadets start out with Naval Sea Cadet Corps Recruit Training, or boot camp, a two-week scaled-down version of Navy boot camp focusing on drilling, discipline, physical fitness, seamanship, shipboard safety, first aid, naval history and leadership, according to organizers. They can also participate in exchange programs with similar groups from Australia, Belgium,

Bermuda, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

Requirements to join include being between 11 and 17 years old and a citizen or legal resident, passing a qualifying physical examination, being enrolled in school full time with at least a "C" grade point average and being free of felony convictions.

Hanks said the organization isn't built for dealing with problem kids but building goal-oriented youths.

TO JOIN

Twenty-three programs are offered to Sea Cadets. To become a Sea



Cadet, call 609-731-4493 or visit the Sea Cadet's Web site at <http://www.seacadets.org/> and use the unit locator to find the local division.

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