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Naval Sea Cadets

teaching leadership

By Lora Carroll/The Leeds News

Driving by the Leeds Armory weekend before last, residents were bound to see north Alabama's young Naval Sea Cadets Valor Division in training.

The Naval Sea Cadet Corps (NSCC) is a program for young men and women ages 13-17 who are interested in developing their skills in leadership, basic seamanship, courage, self-reliance and military discipline.

The main purpose is to foster good citizenship and an interest and appreciation of our nation's sea services including the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

Many residents are unaware that such a program exists in their own backyard.

Last year, the NSCC program prepared the Leeds Armory for training by painting, creating sleeping places and repairing issues within the Armory to make help update the facility. At some point, they hope to use the Armory as a two-week training facility during the summer.

Over 20 young men and women met recently at the armory for a two-day drill session. The two-day drills take place one weekend a month.

The Leeds Armory provides housing during drills, as well as a place where cadets learn and practice the skills needed for their training.

During the weekend's sessions, cadets participated in drills including a victim recovery exercise, physical training exercises and swim qualifications.

Cadets learn and practice such nautical skills as knot tying and splicing, signaling, water safety, swimming, first aid and even fire fighting. They also discuss naval history, customs, traditions and leadership.

"I would not have been ready for the Naval at all if it wasn't for this program," said former Valor Sea Cadet James Youngblood. "You've got guys that come in (the Navy) and they have to learn everything from the beginning, but especially with the time I spent in (the Sea Cadets), the first three weeks of actual boot camp I already knew. This is the best program I've ever been in." Youngblood was visiting the Valor Sea Cadets for the weekend.

Last year he reached the highest rank position in the NSCC program and is now serving in the United States Navy.

Photos



Naval Sea Cadets are pictured during a training exercise. **Lora Carroll/The Leeds News/**
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Youngblood enlisted as an E3 Seaman in the Navy because of the Valor program and right now he is basically two years ahead of others in the program who did not have any training before enlisting.

"A nineteen year old NCO (Noncommissioned Officer) is rare in the navy," said Youngblood.

Youngblood said the most important thing the Valor Sea Cadet program has taught him is professionalism. "Professionalism is the broad word," said Youngblood.

"Along with that comes teamwork, honor, respect, courage, commitment, cleanliness, organization and timeless. Professionalism encompasses all of that."

The Valor Sea Cadets are under the direction of NSCC Valor Division Commanding Officer Kathy Blakely and Executive Officer Ken Youngblood.

The division was named the Valor Division because the city of Leeds is known as the "City of Valor" stated Commanding Officer Blakely.

Blakely thinks it extremely important that the division know the three Medal of Honor recipients in Leeds and about the area they use for training.

"The program is offered all over the United States," said Blakely. "There is only three units in the state of Alabama and we are the only unit located in North Alabama. We have kids who come from all over the state. Some drive as far as Prattville, Montgomery, Huntsville and all over the state."

"The unit is growing and has been at a pretty steady rate ever since we opened two years ago and right now our biggest need is staff members," she continued.

"We are in desperate need of additional staff members, so anyone who is interested in working with youth are welcome to contact us."

"Everyone laughs this is the best-kept secret the navy ever had," said Executive Officer Youngblood. "When we show up on drill weekends on Saturday morning, they don't go home till 4 p.m. Sunday evening, they sleep here, we feed them here and feed them well, participate in physical training here and around the area and teach them the responsibility they need to make it."

"Above all, I like to tell them you've got the courage to make this commitment, carry it out with honor," Youngblood continued.

Students interested in the program do have to meet certain qualifications; they must be U.S. Citizens, meet medical qualifications, maintain a C average in school, enrolled in school, unmarried and drug free.

If interested in the program visit www.seacadets.org.

