

Federal Way students learn cyber security, leadership in JROTC program



Federal Way High School students volunteer for a recent Habitat for Humanity project as part of the school's United States Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) program. The program is also offered at Todd Beamer High School.
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by GREG ALLMAIN, Federal Way Mirror reporter

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Voters might be surprised to know that the upcoming Educational Programs and Operation (EP&O) levy helps support the district's United States Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs that currently run at Todd Beamer and Federal Way high schools.

The EP&O funds help support the pay for the program's instructors, among them Beamer's Major Barry Jones and Federal Way High School's (FWHS) Lt. Col. Randy Long. These two men, and their programs, probably provide a lot more than most people think, especially when they picture what a JROTC program is likely all about.

"Our program is divided up into three areas: aerospace/science, leadership and then physical fitness," Jones said. "It's really an all-encompassing program, and a good fit in (the district's) Career and Technical Education program."

"From a standpoint of what we bring in, and what the kids get out of it, it's a flexible curriculum," Long agreed. "The Air Force gives us a lot of latitude over the things we can bring in to augment our program, and some of the extra curricular things we feel are important to developing better citizens, to meeting that mission of making better citizens."

For Jones and the Beamer JROTC students, the Cyberpatriot program is one of those programs that helps enrich their education outside of the classroom.

The Cyberpatriot competition is dubbed “the National High School Cyber Defense Competition,” and tests students on their knowledge of computers and cyber security. Students are given a virtual “image” of a computer system, and are tasked with finding anomalies and other security-related issues within that image.

Beamers’ JROTC teams have acquitted themselves honorably, advancing through the early rounds a number of times. Jones said they felt like they were doing really well in one of the more recent year’s competitions, when their computer apparently crashed, forcing them to recover their information and try to replicate all the steps they had already taken. Unfortunately, they were unable to pull it off. Jones said they’re still uncertain whether that particular hiccup was part of the competition or not. Either way, Jones sees the Cyberpatriot competition as a boon for all involved.

“It’s a really cool team building exercise, a STEM exercise,” he said, STEM referring to the push for (S)cience, (T)ethnology, (E)ngineering and (M)ath courses in public education in recent years.

Long’s JROTC program at FWHS has participated in Cyberpatriot as well, although he noted that for FWHS, one of the competition teams they’re most proud of is their Academic Bowl team.

“One of our real spearheads we like is the Academic Bowl. We’ve fielded a team each year, and have since we started the program,” Long said. “In 2012, we had a national level team that placed in the top 16 in the country. They went to Washington, D.C. for a week, and competed at the national level.”

Both instructors emphasized that JROTC is not a recruiting program for the Air Force. Jones noted that, at the national level, which encompasses nearly 900 programs and more than 21,000 students, only about 5 percent enter the military. Instead, JROTC is really just another avenue for students to learn about careers, leadership, community service and any other topic that enriches the students and gives them usable skills.

“We’re very big on community service,” Jones said of Beamer’s program. “The last few years, we’ve talked about 3,500 hours of community service. Our goal this year is 3,200 hours, and we’re over halfway there.”

Long noted that one of the most effective extra curricular activities that he feels JROTC provides students is the chance to participate in leadership camps.

“We traditionally go to two or three a year that teaches kids about how to be a follower, how to be a leader. You can’t always get that in the classroom,” he said. “We can read about it, we can study it, but until you get out and practice it ... go out to a camp and put kids in different situations, you don’t get that real life experience.”

The EP&O levy, which is asking for \$53 million over four years, is up for a vote on Feb. 11. The levy supports a significant portion of what the district views as “basic education” needs, including classroom materials and teacher salaries. The EP&O levy helps pay for approximately half of the JROTC instructors’ salaries. The district terms it a “replacement” levy, because it is set to replace the expiring levy that voters approved in 2012.

To learn more about the EP&O levy, visit www.fwps.org. To learn more about the Cyberpatriot program, which is open to all, visit www.uscyberpatriot.org.

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