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PRESS RELEASE

Aug. 6, 2018

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American Legion, Post 543 Partnering Produces Tangible Results for Students

By Sergeant First Class Daniel Corbett, SBHS JROTC

Before partnering with the Legionnaires of St. James Post 543, the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps of South Brunswick High School saw an average of 3-4 Cadets a year dropping the course and eventually dropping out of school. Since the partnership was formed these numbers have been steadily improving and this year there were zero student dropouts. So, what happened?

A few years ago, St. James American Legion Post 543 members Gary Crowden, Rick Sessa and Bill Morgan approached the South Brunswick Army JROTC Instructors with a wild plan: Allow the American Legion to use their personnel to assist the Instructors with their lessons.

Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Tom Blue and Sergeant First Class (SFC) Dan Corbett were intrigued to say the least. Here was a gift being dropped into their laps that enabled them to combine innovative teaching techniques with community involvement. The American Legion got to use their different areas of expertise and share their collective real-world life experiences to train young up-and-coming cadets. The JROTC Instructors could get a little downtime to catch up on their myriad responsibilities and glean information from the Legionnaires, and the Cadets would get less book time and more time with folks with actual expertise in various fields. It was looking to be a win-win-win situation.

LTC (Retired) Gary Crowden started the relationship off by using his years of experience with Rifle marksmanship to assist the JROTC Rifle Team. Under his and LTC Blue's tutelage, the rifle team shot from 25th to 12th in the Nation and last year finished 1st in the American Legion State match. Crowden stated, "As members of the community, Legionnaires want and have given time and mentored the youth of Brunswick County. We feel this is an obligation as citizens. We may have taken off the uniform but not our desire to assist our youth and fellow veterans in need".



LTC (Retired) Morgan took over the classroom portion and set up the initial cadre of Instructors to come in to teach various core class areas like The US Constitution, Personal Finance, the different branches of service and their respective histories, writing and speaking and Styles of Leadership.

Shortly after getting things off the ground, Bill recruited fellow Legionnaire Colonel (Retired) George Freeman to assume lead for the classroom curriculum portion that has continued to expand from the initial few courses to over 20 separate courses, all specifically targeted to young adult development. With each course being taught by subject matter experts in those various fields. In addition to more traditional courses, the curriculum now includes courses in; Leadership Development, Visioning, Goal Setting, Individual Financial Management, Personal Success Measurement and Decision Making.

Imagine a class on the US Constitution and Bill of Rights being taught by an actual Lawyer, Personal Financial Goals and Money Management being taught by an Investment Banker who is used to handling multi-million dollar accounts, Leadership courses being taught by a personal advisor to multiple 4-Star Generals, and classes on the various Branches of Service being taught by a myriad of Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels and other highly accomplished personnel who made careers within their particular branches of Service. These are just a few examples of the skills and level of expertise being brought into the classroom by the Legionnaires of St. James Post 543.



Post 543 Member LTG Joe Kinzer Addresses JROTC Class

To say the result has been extraordinary would be an understatement. Class participation from the students has increased with school leadership fully embracing the Legionnaires support. Efforts of the Legionnaires has been so well received that other teachers across the school have started asking the JROTC Program if they can utilize some of their guest instructors in their own classes.

“The Legionaries bring a perspective into the classroom that the Cadets don’t normally see in a school setting: Real world experience.” says LTC Blue, Colonel Freeman emphasizes the importance of building personal

relationships with the Cadets when he shared: “Our goal, is that while classes taught by American Legion instructors cover the required curriculum, instructors use past experiences to bring the content to life and present it in a way that is meaningful to each individual student.” LTC Blue has personally observed that “bringing real world experiences and lessons learned to these Cadets has been a huge factor in their future life decision making”.

The partnership between the St. James American Legion Post 543 and the South Brunswick High School JROTC Program is positively touching our future leaders and promises to be a mutually advantageous relationship for year to come.

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