



NEWS

CAP National Headquarters
Marketing & Strategic Communications
105 South Hansell Street
Maxwell Air Force Base, AL 36112
Toll free: 877-227-9143

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Azle Composite Squadron, Civil Air Patrol, Makes a Comeback Giving Credit to the Cadet Great Start Program

AZLE, Tex. (March 16, 2021) – From a dying unit to a thriving squadron of over 30 members, Azle Composite Squadron, Civil Air Patrol, finds success in implementing the Cadet Great Start Program to build its membership not only in cadet numbers, but also in senior members.

Three years ago, Azle Composite Squadron was struggling with declining cadet and senior member numbers and was at risk of having their charter revoked and the unit dissolved. At the time, they were meeting in a location that did not have an environment conducive to the unit's needs. They had only three active cadets and four active senior members and the potential for its survival looked bleak. Although the squadron was grateful for the use of the donated space, it was painfully obvious that something had to change and that one of the things that needed to happen was to find a location that would be better suited to the Civil Air Patrol activities.

Working in collaboration with the Squadron Commander Captain Robert DuRall, Major Brian Kilian, an active and determined senior member, reached out to his church and asked if they would be interested in hosting the CAP unit at their site in Azle which is across from the local public high school in town. The pastor agreed to allow them to meet in the church and in April 2019, the move was made. The new location has several rooms available to the unit as well as a lighted, paved parking lot for drill and grassy and wooded areas to perform Emergency Services exercises.

As part of attempting to turn the unit around, Major Kilian suggested implementing a Cadet Great Start Program that he read about in his professional development classes as a senior member. The idea behind the program is to bring in a class of new cadets that progress through the CAP program at relatively the same pace. While each cadet is personally responsible for taking the tests and making progress in their development, keeping the class together provides encouragement and synergy and leaves no one flailing alone.

Captain DuRall agreed to give the Cadet Great Start program a try and during the remainder of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 before meeting restrictions forced the squadron to hold only virtual meetings, the squadron completed two Cadet Great Start programs and recruited 15 new cadets. At the end of 2020 when meeting restrictions were lifted, a third class was held and seven cadets completed the Cadet Great Start program and earned the rank of Cadet Airman.

The Cadet Great Start program gave these teens and their parents a comprehensive introduction to life as a Civil Air Patrol cadet. When asked how this program prepared them for becoming a cadet, the teens said they felt warmly welcomed by everyone and indicated their appreciation for the patience and leadership shown by the higher ranking cadets who taught many of the classes. They also mentioned respecting the senior member leaders who were able to explain topics in more detail when necessary and keep the classes running smoothly and on schedule.



Squadron Leaders and the latest graduates of the Cadet Great Start Program Pictured Left to Right: Deputy Commander for Cadets - Major Brian Kilian, Cadet Marrs, Cadet Moore, Cadet Perrien, Cadet Powers, Cadet Day, Squadron Commander - Captain DuRall, Cadet Commander - Cadet Holz (Not pictured Cadet Woody and Cadet Garrett).

In the five week long course, prospective cadets are introduced to various elements of the CAP Cadet Program – Leadership, Aerospace Education, Physical Fitness, Character Development, and Emergency Services. A resounding theme that echoes through the entire class when asked about their opinion of the program was one of teamwork and accomplishment. Several of the activities these new cadets participated in required them to work together – sometimes one on one, but other times in groups. In addition to these teamwork activities, they observe teamwork in action between the higher ranking cadets and senior members of the squadron who work together to run the program.

From learning to wear the uniforms properly to interacting with other ranking cadets and senior members, these teens emerge with self-confidence, goals, and are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for completing their first Achievement, the John Curry award. Earning the John Curry award signifies a cadet has displayed a positive optimistic attitude and is enthusiastic and team-oriented. The award comes with a voucher that may be used to purchase a cadet's needed uniform items.

The first two classes of Cadet Great Start were primarily led by Captain DuRall and Major Kilian. However, by the time the third class was held, CAP Cadet NCOs and officers, working under supervision, applied their leadership skills through organizing and providing the fun and challenging classes and activities. Not only did the Cadet Great Start program provide an opportunity for new cadets and their parents to learn more about Civil Air Patrol, it gave existing cadets a chance to teach, mentor, and be positive role models. Both the new cadets and their

parents felt the Great Start program gave them an excellent view into the CAP program overall which most did not have before attending.

Throughout their time in Cadet Great Start and continuing into their time as a cadet, each cadet sets goals for themselves that will not only help them advance in the CAP program, but develop skills and discipline that will translate into succeeding in school, life, and careers beyond Civil Air Patrol. When asked about these goals, Cadet Day asserted, "I want to become more physically fit and to climb the ranks" and Cadet Powers announced, "my goal is to become a Cadet Colonel", which is the highest cadet rank, the Spatz Award.

Parents also get a preview of the Civil Air Patrol program during the five weeks they spend attending with their prospective cadet. When interviewed about their impression of the program, parents indicated they were astounded at the opportunities available to their teens and were amazed at the positive changes they began to see almost immediately in their cadets. Tracy Day, now a senior member, reported that she not only enjoyed seeing her son flourish in the program, but also appreciated the positivity and encouragement that he received and the leadership he has in turn shown to others, even to his siblings.

While many parents did not have an idea of what Civil Air Patrol was prior to attending a Cadet Great Start class, afterwards they agreed teamwork and leadership found within the program is a huge asset and a positive draw. Several parents were so impressed with the program, they joined as senior members and are actively supporting the unit as volunteers to fulfill not only the day-to-day missions of running a squadron to provide support to the cadet program, but as members who will have opportunities to serve as aircrew or ground team members during search and rescue or damage assessment missions.

By completing the Cadet Great Start program and its membership requirements along with achieving their first rank, these new cadets will get a bird's eye view of the city in the next several weeks by taking their first orientation ride in a CAP aircraft with an experienced CAP pilot.

Cadet Great Start has been a program within Civil Air Patrol for more than a decade and is one of the many methods in which a unit can bring in new membership. Captain DuRall is the second commander of the young unit that initially began in 2012 as a program at the local high school under the direction of a commander who was one of the high school teachers. According to Captain DuRall, when the high school discontinued the program a few years after its inception, the unit began to struggle with recruiting bringing it to a point in 2018 where it was in jeopardy. Captain DuRall credits the Cadet Great Start program for drastically changing the dynamics of the unit. In his estimation, recruiting has increased by at least fivefold and retention is nearly at 100% with the cadets who have graduated from the Cadet Great Start program. Captain DuRall asserts, "the program has done wonders to help us become known to the general community and to help bring in a group of young cadets that have a real passion for Civil Air Patrol and who are wanting to get as much out of the program as they can."

Major Kilian, now the Deputy Commander for Cadets, feels giving cadets some ownership of the program and its success (or failure) allows them to develop their leadership skills as they teach the incoming cadets. In turn, the new cadets have responded quite well to it. In addition, this relationship is just the beginning for the mentoring and leadership that is central to the cadet program overall.

As a parting thought, Major Kilian cautioned, "Be careful what you ask for. Before you know it, you will have more cadets than you can handle. You must be prepared for the growth that will happen and take steps to grow it in a manner that will allow cadets to become successful leaders within the unit." For Azle Composite Squadron, Cadet Great Start has been a game

changer that breathed new life into the unit when it needed it most. Although there is still room for maturing the squadron, with 22 active cadets and nine active senior members, there is optimism and hope for the future. Three Cadet Great Start classes are currently planned for 2021 with the next one beginning April 6, 2021.

Civil Air Patrol is the longtime auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force and as such is a valued member of its Total Force. In its auxiliary role, CAP operates a fleet of 560 single-engine aircraft and 1,994 small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS). It performs about 90% of continental U.S. inland search and rescue missions as tasked by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center and is credited by the AFRCC with saving an average of 82 lives annually. CAP's 60,000 members also perform homeland security, disaster relief and drug interdiction missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies. Operating as a nonprofit organization, CAP also plays a leading role in STEM/aerospace education, and its members serve as mentors to about 25,000 young people participating in CAP's Cadet Programs.

Visit www.CAP.News or www.GoCivilAirPatrol.com for more information.

CAP Contact Info

Ronda Kilian – ronda.kilian@txwg.cap.gov 817-778-0778



capvolunteernow.com • gocivilairpatrol.com • capmembers.com