

Program Presses on Despite Uncertainty

Open House shows AFJROTC cadets, leaders will push on

Cuts in Coventry's school budget pose threat to career center program

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COVENTRY — One of the many recruiting efforts for the AFJROTC kicked off Monday night at an open house in the high school library where prospective participants had their questions answered and had the opportunity to be a part of the demonstrations.

Lori Ferguson, career and technical center director, along with Colonel Steven Buteau, senior aerospace science instructor, shared what it means to be involved with the program and the doors it can open, whether a student is moving on to a military career or not.

"The objectives of JROTC are to educate and train high school cadets in citizenship, promote community service, instill responsibility, character and self-discipline and provide instruction in air and space fundamentals," Ferguson said.

"The AFJROTC program is grounded in the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do," Buteau said. "The curriculum emphasizes the Air Force heritage and traditions, the development of flight, applied flight sciences, military aerospace policies and space exploration."

Though it offers these, Buteau added that the main thing the program offers and builds is

uncompromised leadership skills.

"This is why I say the program can be for any student who has the desire to excel and be a leader," he said.

Some who attended the open house did have concerns about the program's future and Ferguson explained that the program offered at Coventry High School is the only one in the state with Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) approval, which means they have the ability to recruit from Foster, Gloucester, Warwick, West Warwick, Scituate, East Greenwich and Ponaganset.



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Air Force JROTC cadets Katelynn Stalaboin (far left) and Kim Simar talk to a prospective applicant and her mother at Monday night's open house.

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Program hosts open house Monday

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Ferguson pointed out that while it's been reported that 13 students from out-of-district are needed to enroll to help keep the program funded, because the tuitions vary throughout the school districts, 13 is a rough estimate.

"This is very important for us because, as many of you know, we are currently not being funded due to financial issues and Air Force restrictions," said the director. "This feeds into a portion of the memo sent on December 12, 2012 by Commissioner Deborah Gist where she stated 'as part of our commitment to ensuring that all students have access to multiple pathways, this enables students to enroll in whatever program best suits their needs'."

Through the presentation, Ferguson explained that if a student transfers from another high school, transportation will be provided to and from CHS, the student will attend Coventry High School at no cost to the parent (the home school pays the tuition), the student will take all the required courses at CHS and may opt to play sports for CHS or their home town.

Buteau added that if a student is interested in joining the military after high school, after three years of JROTC, the cadet is given an E-3 promotion after graduation from basic training.

Cadet Commander Katelynn Stalaboin began her presentation by first thanking everyone for coming and all the support parents have given over the past months.

"The fact that you are here and interested is a wonderful thing and being in the ROTC has taught me so many things and how to be a leader and I feel this is my family I'm taking care of," Stalaboin said, referring to her fellow cadets. "If you have that leg up on a student without ROTC, you'll have that benefit and it will help you tremendously."

Stalaboin also stressed how



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ABOVE: (L-R): Cadets Kim Simar, James McBride, Katelynn Stalaboin, Chase Raposa, Melissa Cole and Col. Steven Buteau. **BELOW:** Gina Studley (aka, Drill Mom) showed incoming freshman Eddy O'Loeghin how to turn a rifle.

much the program focuses on developing leadership skills.

"You're being taught to do something, but being taught the right way to do it," she said.

After the presentation, parents and students could make their rounds to the various tables where model planes and rockets were on display and prospective members of the program could test their skills with drill movements.

Raphael Moreno-Solano has been in the program for a year, along with Ben Jackovony and Gian Avedisian and all agreed that the friendships they've made and the leadership skills both have gained in that year have proven to be positives.

"We've gained friendships, leadership skills and more respect for ourselves and others," Jackovony said.

Ferguson said she takes such pride in working with the cadets and said no matter what happens going forward, they have been at the forefront of this battle all year and have "led the charge in the character of the Air Force tradition."

