

Winchester Star

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Young Marines carry the colors

By Christin Coyne
The Winchester Star

Winchester — Few people, let alone children, ever get to serve color guard duty before Pentagon officials, but the Shenandoah Valley Young Marines did just that.

At a Red Ribbon Week event last month, three members of the Winchester organization displayed the flags for an awards ceremony that recognized military-affiliated groups' fight against drugs.

"I've done it quite a few times," Alex Loria Powell, a home-schooled 11-year-old from Middletown, said of serving in a color guard, but added that his experience at the Pentagon was his favorite so far.

The sixth-grade corporal said he has helped to display the colors before Congress, at a baseball game, and twice at the Winchester Speedway, but he particularly enjoyed presenting the flag in front of generals at the Department of Defense.

When he was asked why the Young Marines were invited to help carry the flags and rifles, unit Commander William Molitor said: "I guess it was our reputation."

After the ceremony, 9-year-old Austin Molitor, a Young Marine who is deaf and does not speak, received a promotion to private first class from Medal of Honor recipient Col. Barney Barnum.

The Young Marines are comprised of 14 students aged 8 to 15 who live as far away as Purcellville and Hagerstown, Md. It was formed just over a year ago as part of the national Young Marines program, which seeks to promote drug awareness and abuse prevention. It has more than 300 units nationwide.

William Molitor said the Young Marines organization is not a military recruiting tool, but seeks to keep children busy in their community and helps to prevent drug abuse.

In September, the Shenandoah Valley Young Marines carried the American flag in Freedom Walk, a march from Arlington Cemetery to the Pentagon that commemorated the U.S.



Shenandoah Valley Young Marines Jeremy Sewell, 14 (left), Alex Loria Powell, 11 (second from right), and Anthony Molitor, 15 (right), display the colors during a ceremony at the Pentagon.
(Photo provided by William Molitor)

losses sustained in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Joshua Smith, a 14-year-old corporal, said his favorite color guard experience was performing in front of a congressional building and meeting actor Robert Duvall.

Though the color guard plays an important role in the local Young Marines unit, its members also participate in many other activities.

The group has logged hundreds of hours of community service in the past year, with several members volunteering for more than a hundred hours each.

"They don't get anything for their community service — no ribbons or awards," William Molitor said.

The members have volunteered for efforts such as Meals on Wheels and Toys for Tots.

"Starting a vegetable garden [at the Evans Home for Children in Winchester] might have been my favorite [service project]," Alex said, noting that he enjoyed helping children his own age.

For national Red Ribbon Week, many members of the Young Marines canvassed area schools and businesses, handing out red ribbons and telling the story of Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent who was kidnapped, tortured, and killed in 1985 by Mexican drug traffickers after disrupting a major operation.

Joshua, who has logged 114 community service hours this year, said most of the people he distributed red ribbons to at his school, the Blue Ridge Middle School in Purcellville, did not know much about Red Ribbon Week, an annual drug-awareness campaign.

The Shenandoah Valley Young Marines were also successful in persuading Middletown officials to issue a proclamation recognizing the importance of Red Ribbon Week.

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