
Students Learn To Be Troopers- in-Training During Junior Cadet Law Program

By Tammy Poole

Some of the exercises they participated in were a real eye-opening experience for the cadets.

As the music of a popular song blared through the radio in the Henrico County Jail recreation area, several prisoners danced around the machine, laughing and clapping their hands.

One of the participants in the Junior Cadet Law program peered through the window to get a closer look at the prison yard where the music and laughter was coming from. She jumped back as one of the prisoners pressed his face into the other side of the glass.

“Y’all don’t want to come in here!” shouted one of the prisoners.

“Stay away from this place,” yelled another.

They needn’t worry. These kids were not juvenile delinquents or troublemakers. Far from it. They are rising high school seniors who are interested in a career in law enforcement.

While their classmates were hanging out at the pool or going to the movies, 56 high school seniors from throughout the Commonwealth spent a week this

summer learning what it is like to be a Virginia State Trooper. The students were participants in the 12th annual Junior Law Cadet program at the Virginia State Police Academy in Richmond.

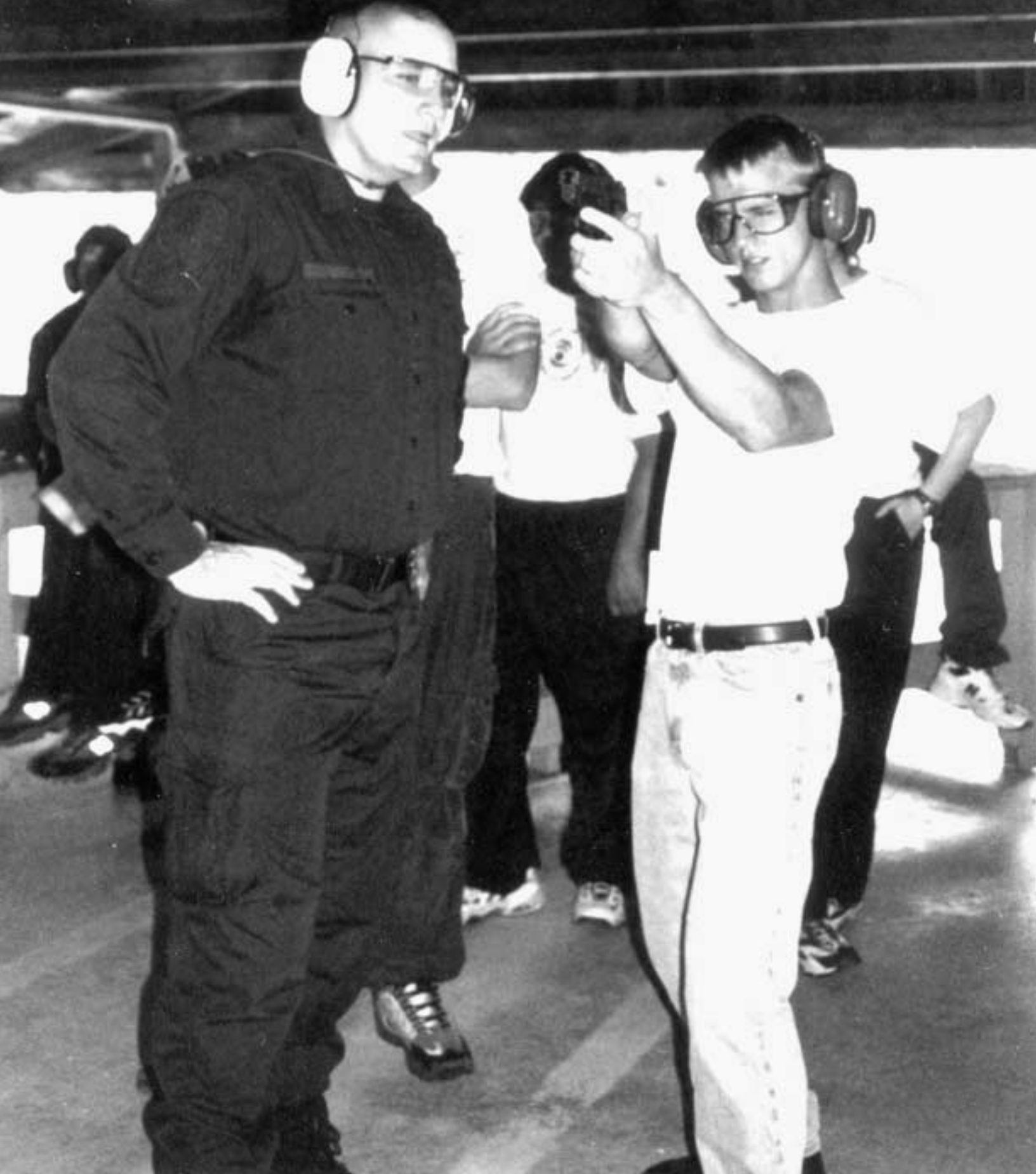
Co-sponsored by the Virginia State Police and the American Legion, the program is designed to give students a taste of what it takes to work in law enforcement. They lived life similar to that of a trooper-in-training during their stay, including room inspections and cafeteria food.

The students’ hands-on training includes driver improvement and firearms safety. They participated in sessions on officer survival, narcotics interdiction, tact team operations and state police operations.

A variety of physical training events was held, including the physical ability test currently used as part of the applicant testing, swimming using scuba apparatus, and defensive tactics.

They toured State Police Division I Headquarters in Henrico County ►

*Cadet Ryan Clapp of Chatham learns proper
firearm techniques from Trooper John Rehme III,
a member of the tact team.*



Junior Law Cadets are listed by American Legion District as follows:

**American
Legion
District**

Name	Hometown	Post	Sponsor
2nd John F. Della Vecchio	Virginia Beach	#113	Virginia Beach
Hiawatha P. Clemons Jr.	Virginia Beach	#113	Virginia Beach
Shakita Wadsworth	Norfolk	#190	Portsmouth
Tiffany D. Davis	Suffolk	#190	Portsmouth
Evan W. Harrell 3rd	Norfolk	#327	Norfolk
3rd Douglas C. Jarden	Hampton	#48	Hampton
Brittany L. Johnson	Hampton	#48	Hampton
4th Catherine M. Callaham	Petersburg	#2	Petersburg
6th LaTonya A. Coley	Martinsville	#78	Martinsville
Brandon L. Dudley	Hurt	#232	Gretna
Ryan N. Clapp	Chatham	#325	Danville
Davina C. Tunstall	Chatham	#325	Danville
8th Stephen T. Williams	North Tazewell	#122	Bluefield
Charles M. Reeves IV	Bluefield	#122	Bluefield
Gavin W. Scott	Bluefield	#122	Bluefield
10th Travis R. Firebaugh	Lynchburg	#16	Lynchburg
Jacob C. Stephens	Lynchburg	#16	Lynchburg
Karla M. Reeves	Brookneal	#16	Lynchburg
Jarred W. Martin	Lynchburg	#16	Lynchburg
Chris Elwood Nash	Lynchburg	#16	Lynchburg
Jonathan D. Ford	Appomattox	#104	Appomattox
Milton M. Pollard	Pamplin	#104	Appomattox
Douglas C. Harris	Appomattox	#104	Appomattox
11th James T. Flournoy Jr.	Chesterfield	#137	Richmond
Kelly M. Gosnell	Richmond	#137	Richmond
Michelle L. Kuykendall	Midlothian	#186	Midlothian
Chrysta M. Metzger	Colonial Heights	#282	Colonial Heights
12th William P. George	Topping	#82	Saluda
Monica J. Schwickert	Fredericksburg	#320	Spotsylvania
Richard M. Tamillow	Spotsylvania	#320	Spotsylvania
Andrew J. Lettner	Fredericksburg	#320	Spotsylvania
Gary W. Hayes Jr.	Warsaw	#401	Warsaw
13th Christopher N. Robbins	Kents Store	#215	Goochland
14th H. Ryan Lightner	Monterey	#155	Monterey
16th Sean E. Quinlan	Manassas	#10	Manassas
Brandon Dassow	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Carlos M. Bratton	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Michelle L. Canterbury	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Christopher L. Hockert	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Nick Wagner	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Lesley A. Street	Stafford	#290	Stafford
Laurie A. Hoffman	Woodbridge	#364	Woodbridge
17th Chris B. Gailliot	Alexandria	#24	Alexandria
Nathan Chotikul	Alexandria	#24	Alexandria
Chris P. Metcalf	Alexandria	#162	Lorton
Brian E. McClure	Alexandria	#162	Lorton
Jeetpal Panesar	Chantilly	#180	Vienna
Raquel N. Ramos	Chantilly	#180	Vienna
Michael J. Finelli	Vienna	#180	Vienna
Tremain Hack	Reston	#180	Vienna
Rebecca S. Meadows	Falls Church	#180	Vienna
Rula K. Hassoun	Alexandria	#270	McLean
Jonathan L. Thornton	Centreville	#270	McLean
William R. Offutt	McLean	#270	McLean
Sarah I. Lewis	Centreville	#270	McLean
Justin R. Powell	Clifton	#1995	Centreville

and the State Police Executive Protective Unit Office, the Capitol, and the Medical Examiner's Office.

Some of the exercises they participated in were real eye-opening experiences for the cadets.

"Freeze!" shouted one cadet, her hands on a weapon as the man lurched toward her. He mumbled something in Spanish as he approached her, ignoring her commands to halt.

She shot him in the throat.

"I'm sorry," she cried, as the victim lay dead on the ground.

"It's a little late for that," said Sgt. Roger Clifton, a member of the Department's new statewide firearms unit. "You just shot an unarmed man who didn't speak English. Why did you shoot him? Were you in fear for your life?"

It was a sobering experience. Fortunately, it was only a training exercise on the Department's new Range 2000 interactive program, which features a variety of shoot/don't shoot scenarios. The cadets participated in a group discussion about excessive force afterwards.

At Division 1 headquarters, they learned how much equipment it takes to protect a bomb technician. They were amazed at the amount of gear that must be worn for protection.

"This stuff is heavy!" one of the boys said, as his fellow cadets layered him in the protective gear.

At the State Police EPU office, they were told that protecting the Governor has its perks, such as posh travel assignments, but it also means a lot of time away from home and family. Wherever the Governor or his family members go, that's where they go as well.

Coordinating the cadet program for the Department were Sgt. Tracy S. Rusillo, Sgt. Paul Branch and Sgt. William Morris.

"It was a very successful program," Sgt. Branch said. "This was my first year with the cadets. The students I had contact with enjoyed the atmosphere and learning what it was like to be a trooper in the academy. We received a lot of positive feedback from the students and their parents. And the American Legion



Sgt. Roger Clifton switches scenarios on the Range 2000 interactive program.

“They told me they want to come back and that they were encouraging others to be involved in the program. They were very excited. I think they were pleased with everything, including the discipline and the opportunities it provided for them to learn a lot about the Virginia State Police.”

Though there was a lot of seriousness, there was also some time for play because

the staff knew they were dealing with kids, he said.

“Trooper Marcus Billingslea has been teaching in this program for several years. He’s always telling the cadets who have a hard time remembering their right from their left to put a rock in their pocket so they’ll know which side is which. At the end of the week, the cadets gave him a huge boulder that they had all signed.”

The entire experience was an enjoyable one, Branch said.

“Everyone had a good time and, at the same time, they learned a lot.”

This also was the first year of the cadet program for Sgt. Morris.

“This was more than a worthwhile program. I absolutely enjoyed it — and I’ll be back next year if they’ll let me ...,” Morris said. “I helped teach them everything, from marching to making sure their rooms were tidy. When I first got started, I thought this was going to be a difficult task. But those kids were there because they wanted to be there. It’s just amazing that you are able to teach young kids who get bored easily so much in such a short period of time. They learned quickly.”

Morris said he spoke with several of the cadets who came in with the idea of wanting to work in police work and left

wanting to be a Virginia State Trooper.

He credits Sgt. Russillo and Trooper Michelle Forker with much of the success of the program, as well as the American Legion representatives.

“Those American Legion folks were a tremendous help also,” Morris said. “If it hadn’t been for them, I’m not sure we would have made it. Those kids were doing something from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m. I worked 72 hours that week, and I was exhausted.”

Morris said he felt that the program was a good thing for students interested in law enforcement to participate in.

“For Tracy Rusillo to put that thing together from the outset was amazing,



Trooper R.A. Fletcher, a member of the tact team, prepares equipment for the next cadet participant on the firing range.

did an excellent job, as always.”

Branch said he and Sgt. Rusillo coordinated the program, but Rusillo did the brunt of the work.

“I’m satisfied with the way it turned out. The students learned a lot of responsibility and information from the classes and instruction. It was a very positive experience for the academy staff and American Legion folks as well.”

Branch said he saw a couple of the participants at an area mall afterwards.



A cadet tries his hand at firearms training.

especially being able to coordinate everything with a bunch of kids whose hormones are jumping up and down!”

With the exception of some of the female cadets wanting to wear inappropriate swimwear to the pool, ➤



Trooper Rasnick adjusts SCUBA equipment for a cadet.

Several of the cadets even promised to continue making their beds once they went back home, he said.

And some of them didn't even want to leave.

Sgt. J.J. Della Vecchio, a 23-year member of the department, is stationed in Area 32. His son, John F. Della Vecchio, loved the program, he said.

"I was a little apprehensive at first. This was his first time away from home. He really enjoyed the school. John's normally a shy kid who doesn't go out of his way to meet people. He developed a bond with kids he had never met before. They had them working together ... This program gave him a lot of confidence. He was ready to do another 29 weeks!"

John, who is a senior at Landstown High School in Virginia Beach, has discussed becoming a Virginia State Trooper, but he also is interested in becoming a fireman, according to his dad.

"I wanted him to get an idea of

everything went smoothly, Morris said.

"The cadets were real receptive. They listened very well. Once in a while you'd have somebody try to challenge you, but in the end, it was an absolute nice turnout."



Class picture, graduation day at the Academy.



Trooper Steve Lowe and Trooper Marcus Billingslea observe the cadets during their afternoon scuba lesson.

what he would be going through ... He really did love it. He stuck the decal they gave him on his car."

The high point of the week for most of the cadets was the graduation ceremony, during which a video of the week's events was shown to the families and friends of the cadets. The American Legion presented the fourth Jessica J. Cheney Spirit Award to Cadet Nick Wagner of Stafford, the cadet who demonstrated the same motivation, drive and enthusiasm that Trooper Cheney displayed as a cadet. Trooper Cheney graduated from the second session of the Junior Law Cadet program held in June 1991, and was the first cadet to graduate from the program and to go on to become a trooper. Trooper Cheney died of injuries suffered Jan. 17, 1998, after being struck by a vehicle as she directed traffic at the scene of a crash on U.S. Route 1, eight miles north of Fredericksburg.

The American Legion selected and sponsored the students with 12 of the 17 districts of the American Legion represented. □