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October 21, 2019

CONNELLSVILLE JROTC EARNS NATIONAL AWARD

Uniontown, PA – Connellsville Area High School cadets have much to celebrate this month, having earned one of the military's most coveted youth awards.

The 74 members of the CAHS JROTC Falcon Battalion have received the Honor Unit With Distinction Award from the U.S. Army Cadet Command through the JROTC Program for Accreditation.

The U.S. Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) is one of the largest character development and citizenship programs for youth in the world. Established in 1916 through the National Defense Act, the program aims to instill values of citizenship, service, personal responsibility, sense of accomplishment and motivation in public and private school students nationwide.

Falcon Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Eric Sheetz, said he and CW2 Joseph Cordier recently led their students through the Cadet Command's grueling accreditation program - a required assessment that occurs every three years.

"It's a very detailed process that involves interviews, briefings, community service - there's an awful lot to do," Sheetz said. "We scored a 98 out of 100 possible points, which is unheard of. It's very high. No one ever gets above a 99, so we're thrilled that we were almost perfect."

JROTC students in grades nine through 12 are expected to maintain individual portfolios, which include detailed reports, essays, resumes, and more. Additionally, Sheetz and Cordier had to undergo a continuous improvement brief interview.

"We had to choose something that we wanted to improve on from our last accreditation and the kids chose physical fitness," Sheetz said. "We showed significant improvement over three years and scored extremely high on that."

Cadets were also asked to present service learning briefings, and spoke about the mock disaster the JROTC recently held in partnership with the Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center's EMT class. Sheetz, an army medic and paramedic, certifies all his students in first aid and CPR.

"The students had to stage a mock disaster at the high school and properly respond to all emergencies, all while being watched and evaluated by an official from the Fayette County Emergency Management Agency," Sheetz said. "Then, they had to brief the entire concept to Army evaluators as part of their interviews."

For their annual unit reports, the Falcon Battalion received a perfect score of 100 percent. Additionally, the group scored exceptionally high on drills, marching, color guard presentations and more.

Sheetz, who has led the CAHS JROTC for two years, said his current cadets stand out when compared to others in his career, because they're "very astute academically and very respectful."

"I've got a lot of students taking AP courses; most of them are college-bound; some want to go into the military or attend trade schools," he said. "One student just got a full scholarship to Carnegie Mellon University from the U.S. Navy to study nuclear physics, so it's a very, very good program. I'm very proud of what these kids do and how motivated they are."

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Vince Vicites said he's extremely proud of the Falcon Battalion for representing Fayette County so honorably.

"Congratulations and best wishes to the Connellsville JROTC," Vicites said. "This is an excellent organization of young people that are making a difference and setting a great example for their communities."

"These young men and women are our future," Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said. "Their performance is something that we should all be very proud of."

Commissioner Dave Lohr said the Honor Unit With Distinction Award is just another example of some of the outstanding things people are doing in Fayette County.

"As a retired colonel, Sheetz brings a wealth of experience to his students and he leads by example, working to instill his devotion to our country in the next generation of recruits," Lohr said. Their performance on these assessments shows how their hard work has paid off. I applaud and congratulate the Connellsville JROTC for their stellar performance."

Sheetz said his students excel in learning respect, honesty, integrity, discipline and so much more.

"A lot of kids want that discipline. They need it; they crave it; and we provide that for them here," he said. "We talk badly about our youth in America, but this program shows there's still a lot of great kids out there. The level of commitment and professionalism you see in these young adults is unmatched, and I'm excited to be part of it."

In addition to outperforming the other 130 JROTC programs in their region, Sheetz said, what sets the Falcon Battalion apart is their ability to work together.

"They're motivated. They have this unbelievable desire to do well," he said. "But what's incredible is how well they work as a unit. They're like one big family, and I'm so proud of what they've accomplished together."

For more information about the Honor Unit With Distinction Award, visit www.usarmyjrotc.com/index.php. For more information on the Falcon Battalion, visit www.facebook.com/ConnellsvilleArmyJROTC/.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The

Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

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