

Young Marines — top district unit

By STEPHANIE M. MANGINO

The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The work of the Shenandoah Valley Young Marines unit hasn't gone unnoticed.

The group has been named Division 2 unit of the year and is now up for the national unit of the year award.

The Young Marines is a national organization with a mission of providing youth development programs designed to nurture young people so they become responsible citizens who enjoy and promote a healthy, drug-free lifestyle. It has six divisions nationwide.

Division 2 basically covers the middle of the East Coast, said Joseph Bles, inspector general at the organization's national office.

It includes 36 units in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, and Washington, according to William Molitor, Shenandoah Valley unit commander.

Being chosen is "phenomenal for us," Molitor said. "It is an accomplishment since we only started in September 2007. We've only been active for a little over two years, while most of the units have been around for years."

More than 300 units are established nationwide.

Although new, the local unit's efforts are already well known.

The children who enter the unit directed by Molitor will likely have the equivalent of a doctorate in history by the time they leave, said Bles, noting Molitor's love of history and the trips the group takes to meet World War II veterans.

The local unit has even visited with former Navajo code talkers, who used a code created from Navajo teen slang, which the Japanese could not break during World War II, Bles said.

The experience is particularly valuable, Bles said, because "they don't make any more Navajo code talkers."

The unit is also extremely dependable, and if organizers say they're going to attend an event, "they will be there."

The group, for young people from age 8 through the end of high school, is also involved in numerous anti-drug efforts. The program, Bles said, is designed to convince America's youth to stay away from drugs.

While it is not a military organization, Young Marines start their time with the group in an experience affectionately called “ boot camp,” according to the national organization’s Web site. They learn about “ history, close order drill, physical fitness, customs and courtesies and military rank structure.”

The group uses a military structure with children progressing from the rank of private to sergeant major.

The local unit is filled with “great, great young people,” Bles added.

The national award, which covers the federal fiscal year from Oct. 1, 2008, through Sept. 30, 2009, will be decided in May at the Young Marines’ adult leaders conference in Reno, Nev.

The national award will go to the unit that has done the most to help its children, the program, and themselves, Bles said.

Information to join

Young people interested in joining the Shenandoah Valley unit can contact the organization through William Molitor at 540-635-9528. The group meets from 1: 30 to 5 p. m. on the first Sunday of each month in the Winchester Elks Lodge at 466 Front Royal Pike (U.S. 522).

On the Internet . . .

www.svym07.com www.youngmarines.com

Winchester Star staff writer Drew Houff contributed some information for this report.

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Photo provided by William and Kim Molitor

Young Marines take part in retiring an American flag at the Winchester Elks Lodge. The local group has been named Division 2 unit of the year and is now up for the national unit of the year award.



Photo provided by William and Kim Molitor

Young Marine Junior Reylonds salutes after placing a wreath at the headstone of a fallen service member at Arlington National Cemetery during the Wreaths Across America commemoration.

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