

CAP's Cadet Program continues to set its members on paths to success

By Kristi Carr

Maj. Shawna Kimbrell may have joined Civil Air Patrol as a cadet to help realize her flight ambitions, but CAP delivered much more than that, contributing to her success as a U.S. Air Force pilot in multiple ways.

Photo by U.S. Air Force Airman 1st Class Ashley Wood

Flights of fancy become real

For those who dream of flying, CAP can turn those hopes into reality. Air Force Maj. Shawna Rochelle “Lex” Kimbrell says she initially joined CAP as a cadet in Parker, Colo., in the early 1990s to help her earn a pilot’s license. “But I ended up doing a lot more,” she said.

As team commander, Kimbrell led the Colorado Wing’s drill team to win the Rocky Mountain Region’s competition and then represent the region in National Cadet Competition. She also commanded cadets in her local squadron.

“One of the most difficult things to do, I think, is to lead your peers, and CAP is a great way to learn that skill,” she said, adding she took great satisfaction in

“taking kids who didn’t know the first thing about marching or volleyball and really pushing them to find their own strengths.”

An Air Force F-16 pilot, Kimbrell is assigned to Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., as assistant director of operations for the 6th Combat Training Squadron, which focuses on joint firepower integration. “The military-like experience CAP afforded me really assisted with my transition to military life,” Kimbrell said, and her experience participating in cadet encampments gave her a sense of comfort when she went on to attend the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Public service continues

A major tenet of CAP's cadet program is service to others.

Dr. Laura Thompson Jones took that message from her days as a CAP cadet to heart as she pursued a career as a physician.

Growing up in a small town in Ohio, Jones said she was able to take advantage of many opportunities through CAP that otherwise would not have been available. Her brother, Ronald Thompson, was already a cadet when she joined what is now known as Wright Brothers Composite Squadron.

"We traveled all over the state and eventually nationally, participating in training exercises and drill competitions, learning search and rescue skills and running activities," Jones said. "As a result, we learned to lead."

As an emergency medicine physician at Marshall Medical Center in Placerville, Calif.,

Jones said, "I love what I do and feel CAP deserves some credit for preparing me so well to handle the challenges of my chosen career."

CAP, she explained, put her in positions of responsibility as a cadet, notably as chairwoman of the National Cadet Advisory Council, and provided her education and experiences through national cadet special activities, such as the International Air Cadet Exchange, the National Flight Academy and Hawk Mountain Ranger School. "Through these experiences," Jones said,



"My memories of cadet life are fond and countless," Dr. Laura Thompson Jones said, adding that she keeps in touch with many of her former fellow cadets.

"I truly learned how to organize and take charge of a multifaceted activity, to manage people, run a business meeting and, probably most importantly, how to deal with stresses associated with those tasks.

"My life was shaped by CAP," she added. She married Dustin Jones, another former CAP cadet and fellow recipient of the Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award, the cadet program's highest honor. Three years ago, along with her husband and brother, who is also a Spaatz recipient, she joined a local CAP unit, where all three provide mentoring to the members of Eugene L. Carnahan Cadet Squadron 85. "We almost won the National Cadet Competition last year!" Jones, now a CAP major, declared. The strong NCC showing resulted from formation of the Group 5 Drill Team consisting of members of the unit and other top cadets in the group.

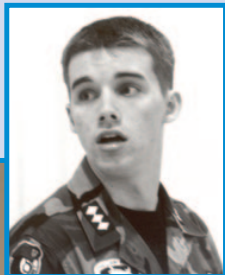
The Rev. **John Reutemann**, now a Catholic priest serving parishioners at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in La Plata, Md., was once a cadet in the Maryland Wing's Bethesda-Chevy Chase Composite Squadron, where he experienced the satisfaction that comes from serving others. He served as cadet commander of Maryland Wing Group IV, Tri-Wing Encampment and National Blue Beret, participated in IACE twice, served nationally on the Cadet

Advisory Council and ultimately received the Spaatz award.

But on the verge of acceptance to the Air Force Academy, Reutemann went on a church retreat, where he felt called to the priesthood. He went directly into the seminary from high school and, after eight years of seminary college, was ordained a priest in 2010.

While he is addressed as "Father" at church, he is "Lieutenant Colonel" at CAP, where he established and now commands the Maryland Wing's Charles

The Rev. John Reutemann was still a Civil Air Patrol cadet when he went to seminary studies. Now he is an ordained priest in the Catholic Church, still active with CAP as commander of the Maryland Wing's Charles Composite Squadron and looking forward to active duty as an Air Force chaplain in another year.



Composite Squadron. Currently a second lieutenant in the Air Force chaplain candidate program, he expects to be active duty in another year.

“The many leadership opportunities I was blessed to have as a cadet have certainly helped shape the priest and Air Force officer I am today,” Reutemann said. “Only in CAP can a teenager be put in a position where he is truly responsible for other people’s training, growth and overall well-being, thus learning firsthand what

command really entails.”

Leadership rules

Retired Air Force **Col. Ken Goss** sandwiched his military career between his cadet membership in the Massachusetts Wing’s South

Shore Composite Squadron and a 25-year tenure as director of government relations for the Air Force Association. Now semi-retired, he is a CAP officer in the Congressional Squadron in Washington, D.C., and is working with the organization’s legislative liaison, Col. John Swain, to push through Congress CAP’s quest for a Congressional Gold Medal for its service during World War II.

“Without a doubt,” Goss said, “CAP gets the credit for my personal and professional successes. It was the foundation, delivering personal values of integrity, honor, discipline and teamwork.” Goss explained he saw the cadet program as a way to experience some adventures, develop leadership skills and learn how to fly. “But it far exceeded my expectations,” he said.

While Goss took full advantage of what the program had to offer, including IACE and scholarships for flight training, he insists it’s the people that CAP is truly about. “Recognizing the cadet program’s 70th anniversary is a tribute as well to all those senior member volunteers who have given so much to cadets over the years,” he said. “Serving as role models, they have invited the cadets into their homes and into their lives.”

Kevin Cooley, chief executive officer for Resource Management Concepts Inc. in Lexington Park, Md., is another former cadet who drew on his CAP experiences to propel him into a position of leadership in the business world. With a professional life focused on providing



Photo courtesy of Air Force Association

As Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award recipient No. 39, Ken Goss was seasoned by the CAP cadet program for a long career in leadership roles with both the Air Force and the Air Force Association.

engineering and management services in support of the U.S. Department of Defense, the Navy in particular, Cooley said, “CAP provided me a valuable introduction to the military culture and vocabulary, as well as how to successfully navigate management processes that accompany a military bureaucracy.”

Growing up near Naval Air Station Patuxent River fostered Cooley’s interest in aviation, so CAP membership was a natural choice. In 1983, he joined the Maryland Wing’s St. Marys Composite Squadron as a youngster. He’s now a lieutenant colonel in the wing’s Legislative Squadron.

“I learned a tremendous amount during my time as a CAP cadet,” Cooley said. “The CAP senior members in my squadron and the Maryland Wing modeled behavior and values that have helped me be successful.”

Cooley especially recalls the benefits he derived from the wing’s solo school, a must for those interested in aviation, and a course in pararescue orientation. “The pararescue course taught me a lot about perseverance and self-reliance,” he said.

Give me one of everything, please

For **Mary Kay Higgins**, who joined the Illinois Wing’s Bridgeview Composite Squadron (later Hometown Composite Squadron) in suburban Chicago in the mid-1960s, life has proven to be a cornucopia of possibilities.



Still a member of the Maryland Wing, Kevin Cooley looks forward to the day his children will be old enough to join the cadet program.

Why choose just one?

Her first career was with the Air Force. She attended a two-year Air Force ROTC program at the Illinois Institute of Technology and through a cross-town agreement with St. Xavier College (now St. Xavier University), where she was pursuing studies in chemistry, she was commissioned as an Air Force second lieutenant upon graduation in 1974. She was one of only six women accepted into the Air Force’s first undergraduate navigator program, graduating at the top of her class in the fall of 1977.

After being promoted to captain and then graduating at the top of her wing in squadron officers’ school in 1979, she received word she

would be trained as a pilot. Two years later, Higgins became the first woman in the Air Force to be dual-rated as both a pilot and navigator. After flying the “Looking Glass” as co-pilot with the 2nd Airborne Command and Control Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., she qualified as aircraft commander at the Combat Crew Training Course at Castle AFB, Calif.

During her Air Force career, Higgins continued to advance and study. After completing a master’s degree in operations research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in early 1987, she was assigned to the Pentagon, where she worked on bomber and tanker effectiveness. By the time she ended that assignment, Higgins had been selected for the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Then life led her in an entirely new direction. While in the Washington, D.C., area, she volunteered to cook hot lunches at the local Dominican Retreat House and to help at the Daughters of Charity soup kitchen in Baltimore and at St. Ann’s Infant and Maternity Home in Washington. In September 1991, she entered the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, providing

Mary Kay Higgins’ cadet experience provided her with leadership skills that have helped her succeed in several career fields, including positions in the Air Force and the private sector and as a volunteer for charitable causes. Since her days as a cadet, she has continued to give back to the program, providing service in numerous positions. Here, then Brig. Gen. William M. Rajczak administers the oath of office for her promotion to colonel.



pastoral care at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore. The next year, she was accepted in the novitiate.

Thanks to a former Pentagon colleague, her resume landed on the right desk at the MITRE Corp., a nonprofit based in McLean, Va., that operates federally funded research and development centers. So began Higgins' third career.

Higgins continued to juggle work in the Air Force and the private sector, as well as volunteering for charitable causes. She eventually became active again in the Air Force, first as a reservist and then full-time, retiring from active duty in 2004. Today she is a lead modeling and simulation engineer at MITRE.

"Without question," Higgins said, "the most important thing I gained from the CAP cadet program was leadership training and experience."

As a cadet, she also earned the Spaatz award. She related a story from her Air Force ROTC summer training. When a major asked the cadets if any had had any experience with Junior ROTC or CAP, her expression must have changed, as he immediately pointed at her and said, "I knew it! Spaatz award?" CAP had given her "a leg up," she explained.

Higgins further believes the Air Force core value of "service before self" also began for her while in CAP. "It gave no room for complaining," she said, teaching her instead to "set the example."

Another CAP cadet who went on to a multifaceted life is **Col. Len Blascovich**. A CAP member for 60 years, Blascovich joined in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1952. Today he is CAP's national historian, making him one of the most senior volunteers in the organization. He was responsible, along with the late Col. Louisa Morse, for developing CAP's history program.

Outside CAP, Blascovich served in the Air Force from 1961 to 1967 and later worked in the private sector as an electrical engineer. He since has been a high-level executive in a number of major corporations, including service as

Then and now, Col. Len Blascovich has loved CAP for 60 years — from the time he traveled to Denmark (not in this panel!) for the International Air Cadet Exchange to serving the organization decades later, whether as the 1997 commander of Blue Beret, as shown here, or as CAP's national historian.



assistant vice president at Science Applications International Corp. and as director of the professional products division for Pioneer Electronics. A member of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, Blascovich also worked on the development of high-definition television.

He credits his CAP cadet days with giving him skills in public speaking, project management and leadership, all instilling in him the desire to learn, lead and excel. Like many other cadets who went on to successful

careers, he took advantage of top CAP cadet programs, including participation in IACE in 1957, going to Denmark where he flew and soloed in a glider; the 1954 National Cadet Competition in Indianapolis; and seven encampments, including service in 1958 as cadet commander leading 1,100 cadets.

His love for the cadet program is evident in his volunteer duties over the years, which have included service as a national project officer for the national drill competition and the IACE ball when those events were held in New York City. He served as director of cadets for the Northeast Region and was appointed volunteer director of the National Cadet Competition from 1997 through 2008.

In 1994, Blascovich started an event called the Gathering of Diamonds, a meeting of Spaatz award recipients that later evolved into the Spaatz Association. This led Brig. Gen. Richard Anderson, a former CAP national commander, to dub Blascovich CAP's oldest cadet.

Party on!

CAP's cadet program revels in the successes its members have achieved — whether in flight, in public service or as leaders in the public sector. Each of this year's 70 birthday candles burns bright with the accomplishments of literally hundreds of thousands of young people who have gone on to do themselves and their country proud. ▲