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## **Young aviators do their part**

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ZEPHYRHILLS -- Shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, seven local Civil Air Patrol cadets were called into action.

For the CAP's Pasco Cadet Squadron, an auxiliary group of the U.S. Air Force, it was no drill.

Cadets Stephen Mink, Tara Guthrie, Hollis St. John, Marc Henderson, Seamus Bradley, Caitlin O'Brien and Aaron Lyon were joined by CAP senior (adult) members Major Mario Bartoletti, Lee Cooper and Dave Uzzle at the Brooksville Airport late that afternoon.

By 9 p.m. they had been sent to four airports -- Tampa Bay Executive (off State Road 54), Hidden Lake (off Ridge Road), Zephyrhills and Winter Haven. From 9 p.m. until 9 a.m. the next day, a schedule that would be repeated on Sept. 12, they monitored airports in an effort to uphold President Bush's order that grounded aircraft throughout the country.

"It was surreal," said Guthrie, who in November stepped down as cadet commander after a two-year stint. "We knew we were going to be called out to do something."

Patrolling the Winter Haven Airport, Bradley recalled how the experience "was kind of nerve-racking. No one knew if the attacks were done. No one knew what to expect next."

There were no break-ins or takeoffs during Bradley's two-day stay in Winter Haven. But had someone attempted to fly a plane from that location, Bradley and his fellow cadets were instructed to record a plane's tail number and report the incident to Air Force and law enforcement personnel.

"There wasn't anything physically we could do to stop them," Bradley said, adding that had someone attempted to ignore the president's ban "we were to inform them that there would be a few F-15 fighters tailing them in a few minutes."

At a November promotions ceremony, all seven cadets received ribbons from the national CAP for their participation.

"Needless to say, they have every right to be proud of that," said Maj. Mario Bartoletti, who in November stepped down as CAP commander.

That assignment is among the numerous duties 34 teens are trained for as part of the local squadron established in 1997 by retired military personnel Lee Selner (Navy), Joseph Voge (Air Force) and Bartoletti (Air Force).

Initially, they trained 12 middle school and high school students as part of the county's first CAP. The non-profit organization trains young adults in aerospace education, emergency services and military leadership.

With programs already in existence in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties, Bartoletti, who worked in aerospace education at MacDill Air Force Base, welcomed the opportunity to start a Pasco County program.

"I was quite excited as I lived in New Port Richey," he said. "And I had a grandson at the time who had expressed an interest in flying."

That grandson, 2002 Ridgewood graduate Eric Lee,

plans to enroll soon at Pasco-Hernando Community College.

Guthrie, a 17-year-old homeschooled student who in June will earn a high school diploma at the same time she receives a PHCC degree, said her CAP experience has proven invaluable.

"The Civil Air Patrol has been one of the best experiences of my life and it has opened up so many doors as well," she said.

Among Guthrie's more memorable experiences are meeting state senator Mike Fasano and state representative Heather Fiorentino at CAP functions. Becoming the first female to command a squadron is another goal she is proud of.

"It was kind of a competition thing," she said of the post she earned as a River Ridge freshman. "I was the young girl competing with the high school guys."

The county's CAP is similar to most others with a distinct difference. The Pasco squadron is one of two groups (the other is in Jacksonville) to include glider flights.

Guthrie, for one, prefers flying in a powered plane, which also is part of a cadet's training.

"It was a little bit small," Guthrie said soaring in a two-seat glider. "I really didn't care for the uncertainty of not having a powered engine. It wasn't my cup of tea."

Bobby Matz, ground crew chief for the glider program, does not share Guthrie's sentiment. While he relishes motor-less flight, his mother, Cheryl Matz, cannot bear to watch her 15-year-old son soar 3,000 feet above the Zephyrhills Airport.

"I don't watch him," said Cheryl Matz, a CAP senior member. "Being a mother, it just scares me."

Added John Matz, Bobby's father, "It's something he loves to do and something he wants to do. Many

people don't get to accomplish that. You think of how many people out there who have the dream of flying."

Bobby Matz, a freshman at Day Spring Academy, plans to get a glider's license and become a pilot.

Alex Patch, a River Ridge sophomore and deputy ground crew chief, also loves to soar in a glider.

"At first I was kind of nervous because I didn't know how it was going to fly," Patch said, "but now I'm over the fear that there's no engine."

Bruce Patton, who takes students up in orientation glider flights and sometimes pilots the tow plane, said most CAP members are enthusiastic about flying.

"The majority of them want to be pilots," he said. "They've already got a goal set and they're working toward that."

Like Guthrie, said the program has rewarded her with self-esteem and a desire for success. John Matz said he has seen a transformation in his son.

"I've seen him mature; be more excited about (personal) growth," John Matz said. "There's nothing out there that you can't achieve if you put your mind to it."

