

As a homeschooling mom of four, I understand the challenges of deliberately embracing the responsibility of raising and educating your children, and giving them the tools they will need in adulthood to be successful, regardless of the direction they choose. Being a homeschooling family can be challenging in many ways, not the least of which is interaction with wholesome groups of young people that are beneficial and growth-provoking to your most precious youngsters. One of the biggest life-changers for my family has been volunteering in Civil Air Patrol.

Celebrating its 85th birthday this year, CAP has given my children real-life, weekly opportunities to learn to lead and practice the lessons learned in a safe environment. They all took the yoke of a Cessna airplane at cruising altitude during one of the five orientation flights CAP offers 12 to 17-year-old cadets before they flew on a commercial plane. They've made friends in other states by visiting squadrons while traveling or doing weeklong encampments and other events across state lines. They've led groups ranging in number from 5 to 250 and launched rockets they constructed.

Aerospace Education, Emergency Services, and Cadet Programs (Leadership) are Civil Air Patrol's three programs. CAP cadets have opportunities to apply to get their private pilot's license at little to no cost through competitive programs. Cyber, Space, and STEM are also core elements of the aerospace experience, unlocking problem-solving potential.

Emergency Services is about just that – training and preparing to volunteer when (not if) disasters happen, whether they be natural, like a hurricane, or accidental, like a lost hiker or aircraft. As the civilian auxiliary of the US Air Force, CAP does most of the USAF-funded search and rescue missions in this country, as well as aerial surveillance after natural disasters and other events like 9/11. Our pilots and air crews photographed the damage that Tropical Storm Helene wreaked in SC and other affected states in 2024, and members stood ready to aid in distributing to the needs of those in Asheville who were still without homes, food, and other necessities.

My family's favorite part of Civil Air Patrol is the Cadet Program, which is all about leadership training and opportunities. Real opportunities with real people for real events; not simulated, intellectual, classroom-study, "idealized" ones. CAP is described as a leadership laboratory, giving both cadet and adult members freedom to learn leadership in real-life situations. Our weekly meetings are mainly cadet-planned and led, though obviously adult oversight and mentoring is fundamental.

Cadets promote through ranks akin to the Air Force and may promote 56 days/8 weeks after their previous promotion. Promotion eligibility is achieved through tests in aerospace and leadership, along with active participation at the squadron, proper wear of their uniform, and passing scores in a PT test and drill.

Cadet life begins as an Airman and continues to the highest promotion a cadet can achieve, that of Cadet Colonel. This link (<https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/programs/cadets/library>) will take you to the Cadet Library on the national website. Under More Key Resources is CAPVA 60-100 Cadet Super

Chart, an intimidating and yet simple resource that is a real gem. It shows each of the cadet achievements: for whom it's named, the insignia and ribbon for it, plus the requirements by age and gender for PT scores, and more.

Cadet Protection keeps both our cadet and adult members safe from undesirable interactions and relationships by requiring the Rule of Three, where no one-on-one interactions can occur, and required ratios of adults to cadets that ensure manageability and oversight.

ACE Basin Composite Squadron meets on Tuesday evenings from 6-8 p.m./ 18h00-20h00 at the Cottageville Courthouse located at 72 Salley Ackermann Dr, Cottageville, SC 29435. Usually, the 2nd Tuesday of the month is PT night which takes place at the park right next door to the courthouse.

There's so much to talk about and so many opportunities that are offered in Civil Air Patrol. If you'd like to look into some of them, here are some places to start.

- Our squadron's calendar of upcoming events:  
<https://scwgc.cap.gov/locations/cottageville/ace-basin-calendar>
- The national website tells all about the organization:  
<https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/>
- All about Aerospace Education:  
<https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/programs/aerospace-education>
- This link addresses the Cadet Program:  
<https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/programs/cadets>
- Adults can serve too! In fact, without adults, we can't have cadets:  
<https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/join/active-adult-in-cap>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I'd be happy to answer them all.

Very respectfully,

1st Lt Megan Atherton

ACE Basin Composite Squadron Commander

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