

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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CLHS Army JROTC leadership team advances to nationals in Washington D.C.

When JD Sanders enrolled at Canyon Lake High School last school year, he didn't want to be there.

His dream at the time was to move to Nevada where his father lives and attend high school.

Making things even more uncomfortable for Sanders at CLHS was the fact that he's admittedly a naturally shy kid who usually doesn't open up to people.

"I was walking the halls aimlessly," Sanders said. "I wanted to be somewhere else."

Sanders' attitude toward CLHS and life in general started to change when a friend suggested he join the school's Army JROTC class.

"I really started to like JROTC," Sanders said. "I felt like it was where I needed to be. I decided to stick with it and Canyon Lake High."

Sanders certainly has reason to love JRTOC now.

Last year, he was an alternate on CLHS' JROTC Leadership Team, which competes every year in a worldwide online question and answer contest sponsored by the College Options Foundation.

In 2009, the CLHS team finished in the top half of the more than 1,600 JROTC programs around the world that entered.

This year, with Sanders on the main team along with Cody Smith, Tinson Mallory, and Philip Carr, and with the help of alternates Tommie Jordan and Nick Sellers, the team was one of only 48 that qualified to compete in the finals in Washington D.C. June 25-29. The College Options Foundation will pay all the team's expenses.

In fact, no team had a higher score in the online leadership competition than Canyon Lake High out of the 306 schools in CLHS' JROTC region, which

consists of programs in Texas, Arkansas, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah and Wyoming.

“I really felt like we accomplished something,” Smith said. “I was happy and shocked at the same time.”

During the competition, students are asked a series of multiple-choice questions online and have to collaborate before giving the answer they ultimately decide on.

The four main categories are: “Thinking Maps,” a graphic organizer designed to correspond with eight different fundamental thinking processes; “Winning Colors,” which teaches students to recognize and work with different group dynamics; “George C. Marshall,” where students have to answer questions about the country-first selfless leadership style of the former Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and U.S. Military Chief of Staff during World War II; and the JROTC leadership curriculum.

Canyon Lake High JROTC instructor, retired Lt. Col. Michael Collyer, said it was hard work and dedication that helped the school’s leadership team advance to nationals in the competition.

“When they made it to the second round last year, they were determined to improve,” Collyer said. “When they actually made it to nationals I was overwhelmed. I knew they had a high score, but to be one of the top 48 is extremely hard to do. I’m very proud of these hard working kids.”

Collyer said visiting Washington D.C. will be a rare opportunity for some of his students.

“To be honest with you, some of my students have never been to Austin or even out of Comal County,” Collyer said. “This may literally be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for some of them.”

As for Sanders, there’s no question he’s found a home not only in the JROTC program, but also at Canyon Lake High.

“When I first met JD, it seemed like he was shutting everybody out,” Mallory said. “But being on the leadership team makes you communicate. It has really brought out a lot of leadership skills in him, and he really opens up now. Honestly, he’s usually the one on our team that comes up with the right answers.”

Collyer said that’s part of what JROTC is all about.

“I know being on this team has really helped JD’s confidence a lot,” Collyer said. “It’s so exciting for me to see examples like this, of kids wanting to

come to school and do well because they are part of something bigger than themselves. JD's become a strong leader in our program."

Sanders said he now has no doubt he's going to be successful in whatever he chooses to do in the future.

"The JROTC builds leadership, character and makes you want to be a better person," Sanders said. "If it wasn't for JROTC, I'd still aimlessly be wandering the halls at Canyon Lake High."

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IN PHOTO: The Canyon Lake High Army JROTC Leadership Team (l-r) Nick Sellers, Tommie Jordan, Cody Smith, Philip Carr, JD Sanders and Tinson Mallory are one of only 48 teams worldwide that qualified to compete in the national finals online question and answer contest sponsored by the College Options Foundation. The finals will be held in Washington D.C. June 25-29.