

Scotch Plains Cadets Fulfill Their 9/11 NYC Mission

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Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

SCOTCH PLAINS -- In the wake of September 11, a group of students from Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School felt compelled to “do something” to show their patriotism and support of their country. These young men and women are members of the Air Force JROTC. But, they were ordered at the time to no longer wear their uniforms at school, for their own safety. New York City was placed out of bounds for school visits or field trips. They felt, like many Americans, helpless to do anything.

Well, these cadets had been taught to “aim high” and strive for leadership in JROTC classes. They decided, with the permission of their parents, to get actively involved on their own. Their reasoning was simple: If a small group of terrorists dedicated to hate was successful in its evil mission, certainly a small group of young cadets dedicated to freedom and patriotism could create and accomplish a mission for the victims’ families.

They chose to raise funds for the families of the uniformed “people of service,” the first responders, those who never returned to their homes and loved ones after September 11. The students initially raised money on the streets of Fanwood and Scotch Plains. They quickly took their mission to the streets of New York City, directly to ground zero, where weekend after weekend, they collected donations for “their” cause.

In addition, the cadets worked at

Ground Zero at a feeding station, volunteering side-by-side with Vietnam veterans of Rolling Thunder and the New Jersey State Guard. They spent hours doing dirty jobs without complaint but with enthusiasm.

On June 7, the SPFHS JROTC held its annual awards ceremony. The cadets, who initiated and championed the effort to assist the families of the fallen World Trade Center first responders, received two prestigious awards.

Cadets Steven Parker, Jason Parker, Valerie Barattucci, Irisa Grimes, Julio Moncada, Larry Ing, Daniel Reedell and Kristopher Piccola each received one of the highest national awards of the Air Force Junior ROTC program, The Cadet Humanitarian Medal.

The Air Force citation, “Outstanding Humanitarian Activities in the Wake of 11 September 2001 Terrorist Attacks on the United States of America,” reads: “You donated your time and effort to bring financial help to those in need, comfort to those suffering, food to those who were hungry, understanding to those who weren’t there and pride to those who support you. We are proud to call you United States Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Cadets.”

The cadets and Scotch Plains Fanwood High School were also presented with a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition that read: “in recognition of outstanding and invaluable service to the community,” signed by Congressman Mike Ferguson on June 7.