

Sea Cadets struggling to rebuild their ranks



By Bill Kilpatrick

Like many youth groups who struggled to keep their doors open and their members engaged throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bancroft Sea Cadets lost members and are still struggling to recruit new members. "We did the virtual thing over COVID," explained Lieutenant (Navy) Crystal Ladouceur, the Commanding Officer with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps 229 Viking in Bancroft, "but you can't sail, drill, tie knots, rig shears, or do shooting. We did that to retain the kids and there were a few who stuck it out, but they were already doing school online and did not want to do online stuff anymore. The numbers went down and they are quite low still."

Ladouceur who is doing her second tour as a commanding officer, is dismayed and frustrated by the low numbers. "We were down to 11 and lost another youth the other day," she explained, "When I did my first tour as Commanding Officer from 2010 to 2015 I had 30 plus kids. The numbers dropped off just before the pandemic, but they were still at 20-25." Ladouceur recognizes that there is always natural attrition, which was something they always struggled with as youth change their interests, but she is at a loss on how to bring the numbers back up again.

Ladouceur explained that when Ian Davidson began the Sea cadet program over 50 years ago his aim was to give youth in the area a chance to experience new things and travel. "That was his aim. He said, 'Kids from here don't get to travel.' Back in the day they would send kids to the east or west coast and that would give them the opportunity to travel and get out of Bancroft," explained Ladouceur. Like many other programs that were impacted by the pandemic, funding cuts happened to the cadet program post-pandemic as funds dried up and as a result the program itself was changed as well. However, reassures Ladouceur, there are still plenty of opportunities to take advantage of and activities to participate in.

Programs that the cadets partake in range from marksmanship, to sailing, learning seamanship skills and there is even an international exchange program. According to Ladouceur, Bancroft is known for their marksmanship skills. "Bancroft has a great reputation for our shooting program," she said, "The last few years we have gone to our zone competition and won silver medals competing against 12 or 13 other corps." Currently, the cadets can apply for a summer program that takes them to the west coast and they spend from two to six weeks training at HMCS Quadra, a cadet training camp located in Comox British Columbia. Other training centers include HMCS Ontario located at the Royal Military College in Kingston, where the youth are taught sailing skills, and Blackdown at Canadian Forces Base Borden near Ottawa. "Depending on their phase, there are two-week courses, three-week courses, and six-week courses," she explained. She also pointed out that there are employment opportunities in the form of staff cadets who work for eight weeks during the summer. "As you get older you can come back as a staff cadet and help run the different training centres," said Ladouceur.

Ladouceur has watched many cadets go on into successful careers in the Canadian Forces and civilian careers as well. "The Sea Cadet program is a very unique program that is inclusive and allows cadets to gain valuable skills and gain confidence" said

Ladouceur,? Also, they are given opportunities to build their skills in citizenship, leadership and physical/mental fitness among many skills. The skills and unique experiences provide cadets with some great opportunities that serve them well through all aspects of life.?

The best part of the Sea Cadet program, exclaimed Ladouceur, is that all of the training and activities are free. There is no charge for any of the activities that the sea cadets partake in. All you need to join is to be 12 years old, be a Canadian resident, and have a valid health card. The Cadets meet every Wednesday evening from 6 p.m. to 9p.m. at the Dungannon Recreation centre from September through June. For more information about the Sea Cadet program email Crystal Ladouceur at Bancroftseacadets@gmail.com. Like many youth groups who struggled to keep their doors open and their members engaged throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bancroft Sea Cadets lost members and are still struggling to recruit new members. ?We did the virtual thing over COVID,? explained Lieutenant (Navy) Crystal Ladouceur, the Commanding Officer with the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps 229 Viking in Bancroft, ?but you can't sail, drill, tie knots, rig shears, or do shooting. We did that to retain the kids and there were a few who stuck it out, but they were already doing school online and did not want to do online stuff anymore. The numbers went down and they are quite low still.?

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