

17 Young Marines complete boot camp

By Erin Frustaci
Staff Writer

Dayana Sorensen's 8-year-old son, Alex Weld, eats, sleeps and breathes military. His room is completely decked out in camouflage gear and as a youngster his hero was G.I. Joe.

When Sorensen heard about the Young Marines program, she knew it was for her son. Weld couldn't have been more excited.

"I looked in the newspaper," Weld said. "I saw it and was like, mom come here!"

Ten weeks later and after completing a taxing boot camp, Weld and 16 other "recruits" became the first platoon of Young Marines in the Castle Rock unit. Platoon 1078 stood strong and proud during the inaugural graduation the evening of Dec. 8 at Community Baptist Church. One by one, the youths stepped forward to accept an award with honor.

"Young Marines is supported by the Marine Corps League and was set up to help kids by instilling a sense of confidence, self-discipline, respect for one's self and others, encouraging them to excel in school and promoting a healthy drug-free lifestyle," said Commanding Officer Chris Proctor.

Proctor, who was in the Marines himself, decided to start a unit in town when Boy Scouts wasn't a big enough challenge for his son. Proctor said he thinks

the Young Marines is a much better program.

During the recruit training the group met from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every Saturday for 10 weeks to practice drills and marching, learn military history, rank structure, customs, uniform care, and complete field training exercises and team building.

"The most exciting aspect of the whole thing is seeing these kids completely turn around," Proctor said.

The kids were required to bring in progress reports from home and school each week.

Like several of the mothers at last week's graduation, Donna Pilcher of Parker said she sees a difference in her 12-year-old son, Austin Ridgeway.

"Austin really loves this," Pilcher said. "I have had more compliments with the way he carries himself, plus it's a way for kids to become involved in their community."

Once the youths are recognized as Young Marines, the program is a lot like Scouts, Proctor said.

"They do the same things as Scouts and can earn different ribbons," he said. "They can also test for rank."

While the program is not designed as a recruiting device, Ridgeway said he wants to be in the military and thought this program would help.

SEE **CAMP** PAGE 3A

Camp: Young Marines group holds graduation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2A

"This will teach you discipline for later in life, no matter what you choose to do," Ridgeway said.

In addition to the basic and physical fitness awards, he was also the recipient of the Meritorious Promotions.

The Young Marines program, started in 1958 in Waterbury, Conn., was chartered by the Marine Corps League and became a national youth program in 1965. The nonprofit program for boys and girls ages 8 through high school focuses on character building and leadership, and is led by volunteers, usually former, retired, active duty or reserve Marines.

When Proctor decided to start a unit, his daughter Danielle Proctor, 15, wanted to get involved too.

"I wanted to get in shape and lose a little weight," she said. "It wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be."

Although Danielle was the only girl in the platoon, she was determined.

"I was not about to let any boy get ahead of me," Danielle said.

And she didn't. She was recognized as the honor recruit, an award only given to

one individual.

Danielle said she plans to be actively involved in the Young Marines, but has no desire to join the Marines.

"From what my dad said, it is way harder than this," she said.

Still, Danielle is convinced the Young Marines is the best

program she has ever heard of.

"It really shaped me up and knocked some sense into me," she said. "It made me realize this is life and you only go through it once."

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