

The LAKER

WESLEY CHAPEL

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MacDill Airfest gets assist from Civil Air Patrol

Wesley Chapel squadron takes the lead

By Kyle LoJacono
Staff Writer

The success of this year's MacDill Airfest that drew tens of thousands can be partially attributed to the Wesley Chapel Cadet Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP).

"We were part of the planning process going back to January," said senior 1st Lt. Joyce Lampasona of the Wesley Chapel squadron. "My husband (Steve Lampasona), myself and several others had planning meetings each Tuesday at MacDill to organize the event from our end of things."

Joyce was the project officer and Steve was the chief of logistics.

"That means I'm the top of the chain of command for the 181 CAP members at the event," Joyce said. "Steve handles the logistics, which means things like communications and making sure other necessary elements of the event run smoothly. There is a lot to manage because about 75,000 people attend the Airfest each day."



Cadet Airman Basic Kate Travis, Wesley Chapel Cadet Squadron, keeps a watchful eye alongside a MacDill security forces member at the F-22 Raptor display. The Raptor was the only aircraft of over 40 on the flight line requiring an armed guard. (Photo by Cadet 2nd Lt. Zachary Dawson)

There were 141 CAP cadets, mostly under 18, and 40 CAP seniors at 2010 Airfest March 20 and 21. Members came from across Florida and camped out at MacDill during the event.

"The CAP's main goal is to assist the Air Force as they put on the Airfest," Steve said. "One way we do that is by acting as a kind of barrier around the static displays of aircrafts. The cadets and senior members answer people's questions about the dis-

plays while making sure no one gets too close. They also put up and take down signage so everyone knows where to go."

Other local squadrons that participated in the event were the North Tampa-Lutz Cadet Squadron, which has members mainly from Lutz, Land O' Lakes and north Hillsborough, and the Pasco Cadet Squadron from New Port Richey.

The cadet leader at the event was Capt.

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Landon Meahl, 17, of the West Citrus Cadet Squadron.

"One of the other important duties we have is to go on F.O.D. walks," Meahl said. "That means foreign object detection to make sure there is nothing like trash or other things that shouldn't be on the runways that could mess up the aircraft. It is essentially trash collection, but it is very important."

Meahl was the cadet commander at the event, which is the equivalent to the project manager for the youths.

"Being the cadet commander is a great opportunity to meet a lot of CAP cadets from across the state while performing a critical mission to support the Air Force," Meahl said.

Joyce said each cadet was on duty for about half the event. The rest of the time they could enjoy the show.

One cadet from the Wesley Chapel squadron who attended the event for the first time was Airman Jason Gordon.

"It was all fun," Gordon, 12, said. "We got to get around the planes and make sure no one was climbing on them...I want to do it again next year."

Gordon has been in the Wesley Chapel squadron for two months.

The highlight for most was seeing the Blue Angels, the Navy flight demonstration team made up of FA-18 Hornet fighter planes.

"That was the best part," said cadet Airman 1st Class Desiree Jenkins, member of the North Tampa-Lutz squadron. "They would fly right at each other and just miss hitting each other."

Jenkins, 13, lives in New Tampa and has been a member of the CAP for more than one year.

"The Airfest is great," Jenkins said. "We got to look around more this year than last year when I went. We also got to guard more planes and learn about them too. It was all a lot of fun."

The CAP is more than just the average youth organization. It is actually the official auxiliary of the Air Force. It was started during World War II and today includes girls, boys and adults.

The national organization is broken into eight regions and further into wings for each state and groups. The Wesley Chapel squadron is in Group 3, which includes all of Pasco, Hillsborough, Citrus, Sumter, Hernando, Pinellas and Polk counties.

For more information on the CAP, visit www.gocivilairpatrol.com.