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## Somers

### Somers woman enjoys thrill of Civil Air Patrol

By Adriane Tillman

On Wednesday evenings, 20-year-old Antoinette Miraglia dresses in her blue pressed United States Air Force uniform, decorated with Civil Air Patrol (CAP) insignia, and heads to the North Castle squadron to teach a group of largely 14-year old boys about aerospace.

The Somers High School graduate enjoys teaching the 22 cadets about the small, four-seat plane she's flown – the Cessna 182 and 172 – about its small engine, the air conditions that affect it and the missions the Cessna is sent upon.

At the North Castle Squadron-238, Miraglia speaks a language uncommon to many: one about jet engines, rifle spinning, Honor Guard performances and wearing her uniform well. "It's fun to be around people who talk about aviation," Miraglia said. "They're interested and will talk back to me in the same language."

#### Taking it to West Point

At the beginning of August, Miraglia's squadron traveled to West Point for the 2007 Northeast Region Conference to join squadrons from eight states for a day of leadership training. During an evening banquet in Eisenhower Hall, the North Castle Honor Guard performed a choreographed piece where they spun and tossed rifles, moved their hands across the machinery in a coordinated beat and marched in patterned formation.

The squadron's Honor Guard formed only a year ago, but already had 10 performances under its belt. The opportunity to perform at the historical academy before 400 people, including high ranking officials, impressed Miraglia.

"It made me step back and realize there were so many important people watching me and my most trusted cadets, and they appreciated why we were doing it," she said.

Choreographing the Honor Guard performance is an innovative challenge, where each practice reveals new movements, Miraglia explained. Cadets from all skill levels are also integrated into the performance.

"It doesn't come from a book," she said. "It's a progress of creating movements and bringing it together. It's up to us if we want to go to a level that's harder."

The squadron's performance at West Point can be viewed online at <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2444162361266920406&hl=en>. A link to the right also plays the squadron's performance at the New York Wing conference.

#### Flying for free

As a young girl, Miraglia spent afternoons at air shows with her father, where she was first introduced to the Civil Air Patrol, which is a non-combatative auxiliary of the Air Force. When Miraglia turned 12 years old, her parents presented her with flight lessons for her birthday. Four years later, she joined a CAP squadron to further her love for flying and the military. Cadets can certify to fly for free through the organization, which makes available planes at the Westchester County Airport to cadets and CAP seniors.

Miraglia hopes to earn her pilot's license with the help of a CAP scholarship before she turns 21 and ages out of the cadet program.

"It's so expensive to do it privately," she said, citing a 17-year old boy who just soloed through CAP.



North Castle squadron-238 Honor Guard performs at West Point banquet. .

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Miraglia said the government-bought planes at the county airport don't get used enough. "If you're a pilot, you can come get CPA certified," Miraglia said. "You can get search and rescue certified."

CAP owns the world's largest fleet of single-engine, piston airplanes, 535 in total. Miraglia encourages anyone interested in aerospace to attend a squadron meeting. The program attempts to interest and educate youth, not put them through basic training. "We won't throw you in the ranks and scream in your face," she said.

#### **Not the military**

Participating in CAP is not joining the military. Cadets and senior members have no obligations to the Air Force, and are simply called upon as volunteers, largely to perform search and rescue missions. For example, CAP pilots rescue stranded hikers or search for crashed planes. Members perform 95 percent of the country's search and rescue. Pilots also perform aerial reconnaissance for homeland security.

"We perform more missions for America than missions for the Air Force," Miraglia said. The cadet commander believes people get "blindsided" by their perceptions of the military. "It's hard to explain," she said. "The first thing people think about the military is Bush and Iraq." As a female, Miraglia said she's experienced no discrimination being a minority in the squadron, although she encourages other girls to get involved. Her squadron commander is also a woman.

Speaking with North County News, Miraglia explained the program in a confident and measured tone, controlling her obvious enthusiasm for the organization. She arrived armed with a packet of information about the Civil Air Patrol and her squadron.

Miraglia said the program has taught her how to think on her feet through CAP, teach a class on the whim and speak in public. She's also met some of the most mature 14-year olds in her squadron.

"It's an unbelievable program concerning the costs and that there's not much obligation." For more information about Squadron 238 visit [www.ny238.com](http://www.ny238.com).

Story continuation goes here

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