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Richmond Explorers set bar high at state competition



The Richmond Explorers placed fourth out of 50 agencies at the Central Coast Law Enforcement Explorer Post Competition in Paso Robles. (photo contributed by Richmond Police Department)

By: [Meghan Walsh](#) | October 12, 2011 – 9:15 am

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Generally, when you sit a 19-year-old at a table with a reporter, it's a classic recipe for one-word answers and evasive glances at the ground.

Yet, Francisco Rodriguez stands to shake my hand. He looks me directly in the eye, and speaks clearly, in full sentences.

"That's everything they teach you in the post," Rodriguez says.

The Explorers, a police-directed extracurricular program that grooms youth not only for law enforcement but also for life, hasn't just given Rodriguez social tools for success. At the 12th annual Central Coast Law Enforcement Explorer Post Competition in Paso Robles several weeks ago, he earned a \$500 scholarship, which will cover his first semester at Contra Costa College, and a new laptop.

"I couldn't believe it when they called my name," he said. "I couldn't stop smiling."

That wasn't the only occasion a Richmond Explorer's name would be called, either. In a field of 490 Explorers and more than 50 agencies from around California, Nevada and Arizona, Richmond placed fourth overall and hoisted eight individual first-place trophies.

The two-day competition included a variety of 21 events designed to test physical agility, awareness, dedication and mental stamina through life-like law enforcement simulations. Participants, ranging in age from 14 to 20, performed mock felony arrests and building searches, and resolved domestic violence crises.

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"It's a huge confidence booster," Officer Jerred Tong said. "We could see their confidence go up several levels from when we got there."

Of the 23 Explorers in Richmond's troop, 15 went to the competition. Of those, only three had been suiting up in the pressed blue uniforms long enough to have attended previous years.

"We were getting huge compliments," said Officer Ray Hernandez, who coordinates the program. "By the end, there were many groups emulating us and even saying they wanted to join our post."

The city covered the entrance fee and lodging, while several police associations chipped in to pay for food and other costs. Hernandez and Tong said many of the kids have never left Richmond, and besides going to school and Explorer training, which is several hours every Monday and every other Wednesday, they have few opportunities.

"We've had Explorers say, 'If I'm not at school, I'm at home. This program keeps pushing me so I can explore something new,'" Hernandez said.



The Explorers practice for several hours every Monday and every other Wednesday at Lovonya Dejean Middle School.

Richmond was the first agency in Northern California to establish an Explorer post, which it did in the early 1970s. In previous years, it has boasted more than 60 participants, but the Youth Services Division recently reorganized the program, setting the cap at 30 to allow for more one-on-one attention.

To join students must maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average; however, this year the Explorers have taken it upon themselves to elevate the minimum to 3.0.

"They've seen us raise the bar and how much we put into training them," Hernandez said. "The best way they said they could show us appreciation was by striving for even bigger goals."

Rodriguez, who aspires to become a drug-enforcement agent, is lining up to be a cadet, a civilian position within the police department reserved for ages 21 to 24. Cadets handle cold enforcement, which includes talking to victims and taking reports after a crime occurs.

"We're at a point where we are molding these young men and women, and we don't want to just let them go," Hernandez said. "This gives them a smooth transition into the academy."

Within the past five years, at least five Explorers have gone on to become officers.

"The discipline, respect and self-esteem they gain will help them tremendously in their journey whatever they decide to do," Hernandez said.

" So glad that the journalism school created this resource! Congrats on year..."

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