

Suncoast middle school hosts one of a kind program for Young Marines

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VENICE, Fla. -- A military magnet program in middle school is making waves. The Venice Middle Young Marines offers students from around the county a much different type of education.

The program was also invited to take part in the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington DC later this month.

It isn't your average middle school class, or your average teacher.



Young Marines

"I am a retired Marine officer, retired with the rank of Major," says instructor Major Mike Dubrule. He heads up what we're told is the only full-time Young Marines program in a public middle school in the country.

They focus on building self-image, responsibility, discipline, and leadership. "At this age, they really need that. They need to know there is more to life than just computer games and things like that. We have had so many success stories. It's fantastic to be a part of it."

"When I first got in, I was kind of like scared." 8th grader Heather Krizen has been in the program for its first three years. She says she's seen a change in herself and her fellow classmates. "When they get into it, their discipline starts to shape up, and they come more out of their shell."

It's certainly a different concept for kids aged 11-13.

"There was some question about if we were growing soldiers at Venice Middle School. The answer to that is no. I invite everyone to come see for themselves." Principal Karin Schmidt says the program offers choice. She says it's not targeted at troubled students or those looking for a military future. All have to apply and have to keep their grades up or miss out on special programs and trips.

She says the regiment is making a noticeable difference. "I have seen over the three years phenomenal growth, and maturity. Really, kids finding out who they really are within themselves. It's amazing."

And the extra effort is paying off.

"It's an honor to be in this program and an honor to go to DC," says 8th grader Trevor Rowland. He

is one of 68 students in the program who have been invited to appear in the parade in Washington DC.

More than \$70,000 was raised locally for the trip. "There have been so many donors and family members, community members and organizations come to our aide."

Appreciation and respect not lost on those there. "It's a big year with a lot of veterans coming home from Afghanistan, as well as the veterans of other wars that this means a lot to them to see these kids in uniform honoring them and their service. They feel proud to be a part of that, and so do I."

The Young Marines program is a magnet program. It means students from all over Sarasota County can apply.