

USAOTC leaders tell kids to 'accept responsibility'

By Eloise Lundgren, OTC Public Affairs



Brigadier Gen. Don MacWillie, commander, USAOTC, speaks with students from Rancier Middle School during a visit to his alma mater. MacWillie and Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bobb encouraged the students to work now toward their future goals in life. (Photo by Tad Browning, OTC)

The primary message from two of the U.S. Army Operational Test Command senior leaders was crystal clear: you can be anything you aspire to be, but you can't do it alone and you have to accept responsibility.

USAOTC's Commanding General, Brig. Gen. Don MacWillie, and the command's senior noncommissioned officer, Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Bobb, hammered the point home in separate sessions with Rancier Middle School seventh- and eighth-graders during a series of character-building lectures last week.

“As one K-Roo to another,” MacWillie, who is a graduate of Rancier Middle School, said, “you can’t grow up to be a successful individual if you don’t take responsibility. When something goes wrong, it’s not because someone else did it; it’s because you did it yourself.”

MacWillie told the nearly 200 eighth graders that even though he’s a general officer, he still makes mistakes. “You’re going to make mistakes every day,” he said. “I do, and when I do, I fess up to it and stand by what I did.”

MacWillie told the children he was an average student at Rancier who didn’t know what he wanted to do beyond high school. He participated in scouting and played every sport available, he said, not because he was an outstanding athlete, but to improve himself.

If it weren’t for his parents, teachers, scout leaders and principals, MacWillie said, he wouldn’t be where he is today. “My eighth-grade social studies teacher had a clock with a sign underneath it that read ‘Time is passing; are you?’” he said.

“He told us that if we didn’t take responsibility for our actions, someone else would, and we probably wouldn’t like the outcome,” MacWillie said. “As eighth graders, you are the leaders of this school, and with that comes accountability.”

Praising the teachers of today for their passion, Bobb told the 250 seventh graders they should pay attention to the “great teachers you have here because if you want to be any kind of leader, you have to have an education.

“Unfortunately, when I was growing up,” he said, “I didn’t pay attention in school; I didn’t focus. All I ever wanted to do was be in the military, so I quit school my junior year and joined the Army.”

Thanks to some great NCOs who made him earn his high school diploma, Bobb said, he was promoted to sergeant when he was 19 and realized then he’d made a mistake by not pursuing higher education. He earned associate in arts and bachelor of business administration degrees, which helped him get promoted to sergeant major, he said.

“I learned the hard way,” Bobb said, “but you don’t have to. Have fun now, but have those long-term goals about college and a career.”

Bobb said the core Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage kept him grounded in every aspect of his life.

“I’m so happy I get to put these boots on every day,” he said, “and do what I always wanted to do – be a Soldier.”

The USAOTC leaders were part of the national Character Counts! Program Week organized at Rancier by Rick Marasco, Middle Years Program and character education coordinator.

“This program features the six pillars of character,” Marasco said, “trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. The message is to strive for good character at all times in every situation.”

Rancier is part of the International Baccalaureate program at Killeen High School, according to Marasco. “We are a Middle Years Program school, which challenges faculty to provide opportunities to students to explore the nine learner profiles – inquirer, thinker, communicator, caring, principled, knowledgeable, balanced, open-minded and risk takers – and make use of them in their own lives,” he said.

In addition to MacWillie and Bobb, Killeen Mayor Tim Hancock talked to the student council and National Junior Honor Society members about responsibility in leadership roles.

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