

Brothers serve in Civil Air Patrol squadron

By **BECKY LOCK**
Sentinel correspondent

Mothers have some of the best ideas.

Carolyn Malfara suggested her 14-year-old son, Leo, look into joining the Civil Air Patrol after he expressed interest in joining the Army.

Although the Civil Air Patrol, or CAP, is affiliated with the Air Force, it provides an introduction to military discipline, traditions and physical training.

"There's no Junior ROTC in this county, but the Civil Air Patrol is pretty close," Leo says.

Junior ROTC, or Reserve Officer Training Corps, gives young men and women a chance to explore units of the armed forces. Graduates of the program are not required to join the military.

In contrast, the Civil Air Patrol is open to anyone age 12 or older. It is a volunteer organization with about 61,000 members, most of whom do not have a military background, says Jennifer Lichlyter, public affairs officer with CAP's Harrisburg International Composite Squadron 306.

"The Civil Air Patrol is a 'best-kept secret,' I think," Lichlyter says. "It's a really great program for youth."

Malfara had heard of the CAP when she was growing

up. Her family — grandfather, father and brother — all served with the Navy.

CAP has three missions:

- Emergency services;
- Aerospace education;
- Cadet programs.

"I was hesitant (of joining CAP)," Leo says, but after nearly two years of membership in the organization, he is enthusiastic.

"It's taught me to not wait around (but to) go forth and do things," he says, "to make sure a task gets done."

His interest in CAP is contagious. Leo's brother, 12-year-old Damien, will celebrate his one-year anniversary in April.

"I joined because my brother did," Damien says. "I thought it would be cool."

Members earn ranks in the patrol and have specific jobs to do. Leo is a radio operator for his unit. He is ranked as a senior airman and earned a Ranger 3rd Class designation. Damien is an Airman 1st Class.

Every Wednesday from 7 to 9 p.m., his squadron meets at the Harrisburg International Airport. Each meeting is devoted to a particular event.

For instance, "the first Wednesday of the month is PT (physical training)," Leo says.

"I love the runs," Damien says, referring to the one-mile

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Leo Malfara, 14, of Thompsonstown, right, is ranked as a senior airman and earned a Ranger 3rd Class designation, while his brother, Damien, 12, is an Airman 1st Class in the Civil Air Patrol.

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