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Moraga's Police Cadet Program a Win-Win Deal

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Moraga Police Cadet Max Juster Photo C. Dausman

Max Juster found meaningful work as a public servant before he finished high school. Juster, a 2011 Campolindo High School graduate, is a cadet in the Moraga Police Department, and his training may give him a leg up on the law enforcement career he hopes to pursue after college.

Juster would like to attend a state Police Academy in a few years, and become a policeman like his father. Until then, he says he'll do whatever work the department asks him to do, whether that is answering phones, learning radio codes, interacting with the public or riding alongside a regular officer.

Moraga is "big into volunteers," says the Moraga Police Department's Sergeant Brian South, and volunteers like Juster help the town. South should know—he is also a Campolindo graduate who spent a year as a police cadet, a year as a reserve officer and has nine years as a sworn officer. South has managed the Moraga Police cadet and reserve programs for the last five years.

Moraga Police Cadet training is a flexible, three-tier program, says South. New cadets start in the office, where they learn the everyday workings of the department. They progress to driving evidence to a

lab, the district attorney or the courthouse. The third step involves law enforcement duties like assisting with traffic control, tagging abandoned cars, running vacation house checks or assisting at the firing range. The department provides their uniforms, but Moraga Police Cadets are neither sworn nor armed. Cadets were formerly affiliated with a Boy Scout Explorer Post, but they have since developed their own independent program.

Moraga's cadet program has been a real success, says Chief Robert Priebe: "It's a win-win situation, good for the town, and good for the program." Priebe says the program began in the early 1980's and is a public service opportunity for juniors and seniors in high school and those in college, as well as a natural conduit for a career in law enforcement.

One recent cadet, Scott Inouye, now works for the U.C. Davis Police Department. Claire Damon earned school credit while working as a cadet; Damon recently graduated from St. Mary's College, and has returned to her home state.

Juster volunteers eight hours a week and plans to attend U.C. Merced this fall. He was issued a radio and was busy learning police codes the day he was interviewed. He says his most memorable event as a cadet has been attending an all-day EVOC driving course taught by the Alameda County Sheriff's Department.

Lafayette and Orinda police departments also offer police cadet programs. The Lafayette program is set up as a Boy Scout Explorer Post and administered by Sgt. Joshua Patzer. Officer Kevin Mooney heads Orinda's program.

South says Moraga needs more young men and women for their cadet program. Those interested should contact him by phone at 888-7052 or e-mail south@moraga.ca.us. As South's boss, Chief Priebe says succinctly, "After Max is gone, we're down to zero."

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