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# Student fulfills dream, enrolls in U.S. Navy sea cadet program

## Dearborn teen wants to emulate father's service



**High school students sail to Port Huron aboard the Greyfox as part of the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet program. The program introduces would-be sailors to life and learning on the seas.**

**By David C. Butty / The Detroit News**

Ryan Gazdecki joined the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet program because he loves water.

Ryan, 15, is a ninth-grader at the Sankore Marine Immersion High School Academy, and was one of 40 students from the school at 3100 E. Jefferson, who traveled to Port Huron for a day of hands-on learning on board the Greyfox, a 120-foot long former U.S. Navy Torpedo recovery vessel.

For Ryan, this was a dream come true. "When I heard about this

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school, I knew it would be my childhood dream of one day working on some kind of ship like my father," he said.

Since last fall, Ryan's parents would drive him from their Dearborn home to the academy at 3100 Dearborn and each day, Ryan would hope that his dream would come true.

The academy, where the Golden Gators rule supreme as the school's mascot, takes in only ninth-graders with hope of adding a grade each year until it becomes a full high school. Currently 135 students are enrolled.

Sankore is chartered through the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency. It is named after Sankore, ancient African center of learning in Timbuktu, Mali, West Africa.

Sankore "A Place for Learning" flourished between the 13th and 16th centuries and people came from far and wide to study there. Although the main focus is on marine science, it also stresses integrated learning.

"My dad used to be in the Navy and he would tell me all kinds of stories about the Navy and all the different countries he had gone to," said Ryan who wants to one day be like his father. "The way he talks about his experiences in the Navy increased my interest to want to join the Navy some day. I'm starting with the Sea Cadet program first. I want to one day be an engineer in the Navy."

On board the Greyfox, Ryan said he joined other students on drill simulating real live situations. "For example, we were blindfolded and had to find our way from our sleeping quarters to go on the deck of the ship," he said. "It was like an emergency drill, but it was easy getting out on deck although there were all kinds of stuff in your way. But we managed to get out."

Like Ryan, Lanita Moss praised the program. Lanita, who wants to one day be an engineer, said it was her first time seeing an actual engine room of a ship.

"The engine room was noisy and inside the ship was small," said Lanita, 14, whose love for engineering started on the day she fixed her sister's roller skates at age 4. She said the trip on board the Greyfox increased her interest in becoming an engineer.

"What I like about the Navy Sea Cadet program is that it teaches you to stay on time and stay focused," said Lanita, who loves to dance African music, ballet, jazz and a little of modern dance. "The program teaches you discipline and offers you hands-on training. Although this is a new school, I'm beginning to like it."

The school's curriculum includes language arts, social studies, science, foreign language, and lays strong emphasis on marine biology, and the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet program.

Dan Cook, who teaches Marine science at Sankore, said the school helps students develop career goals.

"I teach them the different devices used on ships," he said. "They

have to learn how to drive on the river just as they learn how to drive on the highway. They are learning how to maintain a boat and repair marine engines."

Cook, a former state trooper, said the main emphasis is on Marine science and military courtesy, first aid, how to fight fire on board a vessel and how to save each other in case of emergency.

"Teaching helps you to see the fruits of your work and I'm hoping that one day all of the students at Sankore will have the opportunity to go to Navy Sea Cadet program," he said.

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