

Grayfox moored at Wenonah Park, Sea Cadets crew runs ship

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By



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Petty Officer Third Class Thurlo Minhinnick, 17, of Algonac, stands aboard the United States Naval Sea Cadet Ship Grayfox.

BAY CITY — Thurlo Minhinnick grew up with a love of pirates and ships and a desire to join the military.

Today, the 17-year-old Algonac resident is an officer aboard the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet Ship Grayfox, where he's learning the skills necessary to make his dreams come true.

"This is the best organization to be in military-wise," said Minhinnick Thursday, standing on the deck of the ship in a light blue uniform and aviator sunglasses.

Minhinnick is one of 35 cadets on the ship, which is arrived in Bay City earlier this week and is moored

in Wenonah Park until Monday when it returns to its home port of Port Huron.

While anchored here, the Grayfox crew — made up in part of Naval Sea Cadets ages 14-18 and Navy League Cadets ages 11-13 — is offering tours to the public and two-hour cruises to groups including Do-All Inc. and New Dimensions, said Mike Kegley, president of the Saginaw Valley Naval Ship Museum, the organization hosting the visit.

The public may come aboard the ship during off hours, typically after 3 p.m. into the evening, he said. Tours are free, but donations are accepted.

Kegley said the public always is very receptive to any ships that visit Bay City, including the Grayfox, which has been coming to Bay City for a week each summer for more than a decade.

At 120 feet long, the Grayfox is the largest Sea Cadet training vessel in the United States. It was built in 1984 and served time in the Caribbean and



Hawaii as a recovery vessel during torpedo drills.

Despite its dimensions, Minhinnick said it gets crowded at times. A single-stall bathroom with one shower and one sink, for instance, has to serve 18 of the cadets and typically has a line at least three people long, he said.

Seaman apprentice Breanna Karish, 15 of Grand Haven, said the quarters for the two female cadets on the ship are “like a little closet,” but she’s enjoying her first trip on the ship.

The ship’s day-to-day operations — including watches from the fore and aft decks, steering the ship, delivering messages between crew members and performing quartermaster duties — all are performed in rotations by the young crew, Minhinnick said.

The work is done under the supervision of volunteer Sea Cadet officers and civilian instructors.

Wake-up calls come as early as 6 a.m., followed by an hour of physical training, eating breakfast, showering and cleaning the ship, Minhinnick said.

“It’s kind of intense,” he added. “This morning, I had to bang a pot and pan in everyone’s deck (to wake them up).”



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The captain's wheel in the wheel house of United States Naval Sea Cadet Ship Grayfox while moored in Bay City.

Minhinnick said he joined the Navy Sea Cadets four years ago and has plans to join the Navy after graduating from college. While some of the cadets only man the ship in the summer, he said his division drills on weekends throughout the year.

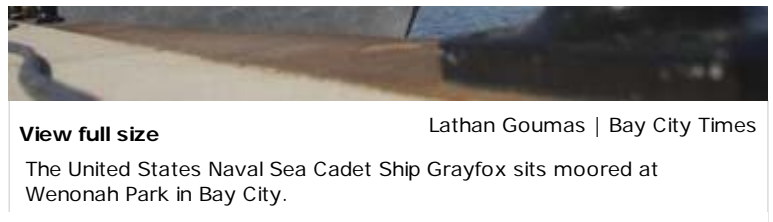
He said the experience helped him “grow up” and taught him how to better communicate with other people. As one of the older officers on the ship, he helps solve disputes between younger cadets and make sure things run smoothly.

The cadets also learn how to handle all the equipment aboard the ship, including compasses, fire stations, and emergency life dinghies that are filled with food and supplies in case the ship were

to go down.

Sometimes the crew also runs drills to make sure everyone stays alert.

The cadets responded to a man overboard call during their cruise from Port Huron to Bay City, but the “man” turned



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The United States Naval Sea Cadet Ship Grayfox sits moored at Wenonah Park in Bay City.

out only to be a foam training dummy named Oscar.

The drill didn't go as planned.

"We ran over Oscar," Minhinnick said. "There was foam all over the water."

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