

Two Sea Cadet Units Qualify for National CyberPatriot Finals



Band of the West and Sacramento Division Sea Cadets shown with Navy League CEO Mike Stevens in 2019. U.S. NAVAL SEA CADET CORPS

BETHESDA, Maryland – The U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps has qualified two teams to compete in the CyberPatriot National Final team competition set for March 17-21 in Bethesda, Maryland.

Sacramento Division and Band of the West Division will represent the youth organization at the All-Services Division Nationals. Both units are based in California and have years of experience competing in CyberPatriot annual competition.

Sacramento Division's Team Spartan has competed in the All-Services Division Nationals competition five years in a row since 2018.

"I enjoy witnessing each one of my CyberPatriot members develop their skills, foster friendships, and work as a team," said Sea Cadet Ensign Matt Foreman. "I feel like my job is to provide general direction, a safe place to compete, and the resources for them to succeed."

Foreman added that four of the youth team members have made it to nationals four years in a row.

"This year, three of those elite members are now celebrating their fourth year in a row, which should qualify them for special recognition," said Foreman.

Each of the Team Spartan cadets specializes in one of three platforms: Microsoft Windows, Linux, or Cisco. When he thinks of leaders and the impact they can have, he recalls the famous Gen. George S. Patton quote. "Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results."

In its 14th year, the CyberPatriot program has more than 5,200 teams competing, of which the Sea Cadet youth organization had nearly 20 teams enrolled. The CyberPatriot program helps direct students toward careers in cybersecurity or another computer, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics discipline.

Band of the West Division's CyberPatriot Team Silicon Knights Team and the Sacramento Division's Team Spartan benefit from keen experts who guide cadets, such as the instructor Lt. j.g. Ming Ikehara, who serves as a volunteer training officer and brings forth extensive knowledge and experience in cybersecurity for the Silicon Knights.

"For cadets to acquire technological skills and critical

thinking to protect personal privacy to national defense is extremely essential and important," said Ikehara. "I also volunteer to inspire girls to get into cybersecurity and engineering disciplines."

Petty Officer 1st Class Arkin Si, team captain, Silicon Knights, emphasized the amount of time devoted to the CyberPatriot team leading up to the annual competition to the nationals.

"Our team practiced every week for an hour each time, which doesn't include the countless hours outside of practice that members needed in order to become accustomed to the various operating systems that they were unfamiliar with, especially the strategies needed for the competition," said Si.

The Silicon Knights have been to National Finals three previous times, in 2016, 2018 and 2020. The members join the CyberPatriot team. They practice and compete outside of their regular drill time since they represent the nation's only Sea Cadet band.

Team Spartan is like Team Silicon Knights in the type of dedication these cadets displayed.

"Most learning took place independently via school classes, independent practice, and team collaboration," said Foreman. "These cadets are passionate about preparing for CyberPatriot competitions. They spend countless hours preparing for each competition."

The Sea Cadets who participate and lead the teams, such as Chief William Smith, who serves as the captain of Team Spartan, said participating in CyberPatriot has been an unforgettable experience for each of them and they are honored to represent the Sacramento Division again this year.

"CyberPatriot has provided Team Spartan the unique opportunity to broaden our cybersecurity skills through learning from

real-world scenarios and threats,” Smith said. “We are very grateful for the tremendous support from Sacramento Division of the Sea Cadet Organization. The discipline, teamwork, and leadership skills we’ve trained have helped us qualify for National Finals in the past five years.”



Band of the West and Sacramento Division Sea Cadet teams at the 2019 CyberPatriot finals. *U.S. NAVY SEA CADET CORPS*

Foreman added that new team members experience a steep learning curve, but senior team members mentor the new cadets and foster their skills.

“Overall, the success of team Spartan is not forced. Rather, it is fueled by their desire and personal interest,” said Foreman.

Ikehara said she enjoys teaching the youth about cybersecurity, and her motivation to instruct the youth centers on introducing them to cybersecurity career paths, but

more importantly to training them to be vigilant cyber citizens in everyday life.

The Silicon Knights team has a better understanding of cybersecurity from participating in CyberPatriots.

“Understanding cybersecurity is crucial to ensure safety as the world moves toward automation and increases its reliance on computers. It is also important to understand how to secure a computer and ensure that it has no vulnerabilities that can be exploited,” said Si.

Each member spends at least 80 hours of instructor-led and online courses each season. Many of the cadets spend more hours on their own to study and research materials on their own.

“We have great resources to tap into and of course, it furthers esprit de corps and brings pride to our unit. We are also proud to serve and represent the NSCC on a national level,” said Lt. Cmdr. Jo-Anne Dao, commanding officer, Band of the West Division. “I always remind my cadets that this is their team, not mine. And they may take it as far as they wish, but I am here to offer support in any way or form for them to succeed. But ultimately, it is their hard work, determination, and teamwork that will get them to where they want. Great life lessons here.”

For the Silicon Knights Team, many of their youth members start as middle schoolers and continue to the high school team. In the past six years, their team has consistently achieved the Platinum tier. The unit has a second high school team, the Silicon Ensembles, which has also achieved 1st place in the state awards in season 10.

Dao emphasized the sheer level of training, commitment and talent that went into competing this year.

“The Silicon Knights must be in good standing in the Band of

the West in order to even participate,” she said.

This means that in addition to the weekly drill, team members train, practice, and compete outside drill hours from November through March. This is a huge commitment from cadets and staff,” said Dao, but all that effort definitely paid off.

“For me, I am just so proud of my cadets. They come from all over the San Francisco area from different backgrounds and they all work together as a team to make it this far,” said Dao.

She added that the cadets competing in CyberPatriot are also based in Silicon Valley and from her vantage point, it is important because so many cadets have an interest in this field for future careers.

Lt. Cmdr. Jeffery Dao, who is married to Jo-Anne Dao, serves as the regional director for the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

“We are so proud of the cadets and grateful to Lt. j.g. Ikehara for making this opportunity possible,” said Dao, who serves as the executive officer for Band of the West, was thankful to the Navy League Marin County Council for their financial support and the Navy League STEM Grant which allowed his unit to equip its cadets with the computing gear and instructional materials needed for this training. “U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps units should apply for STEM grants,” he said.