608 Duke of Edinburgh Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron

WO1 Taylor Waite

With the arrival of the new year, the 608 Belleville Air Cadets have completed a successful first half of our virtual training program. Despite the many obstacles the cadets have faced, they have persevered and remained loyal and dedicated to the cadet program. Each week for the past 4 months, the cadets at 608 met virtually for 2 hours, experiencing all aspects of the cadet program. From completing mandatory training through lessons, participating in virtual Sports Nights, and welcoming guest speaker, Lola Reid Allin to the squadron, the Dukes have remained active and connected in such an unprecedented time. This training continues with the arrival of 2021, and is improving each week.

Each Wednesday evening, our Level 5 instructors produce and conduct interactive classes for each training level. Through the use of PowerPoints, Kahoot games, videos, and other creative forms, these virtual lessons assist with the retention and retrieval of information, and provide the cadets with a variety of ways to learn and engage. The senior cadets at 608, alongside the dedicated staff, are able to create a virtual atmosphere that keeps the program alive and running within our squadron. This is especially evident through our end of the month “Sports Nights,” rewarding the cadets for their hard work and successful completion of training. Organized and conducted entirely by our Level 4 and 5 cadets, this leadership opportunity has proven to be a success at our squadron. So far, our squadron has conducted 3 of these nights away from our regular training and parades, each with a theme. Our Halloween and Christmas nights had the cadets gather as a group and engage in an abundance of activities; scavenger hunts, mask-making competitions, origami, and baking lessons, to name a few. Not only has this been a fun way of keeping our squadron tradition alive, the cadets were rewarded for their participation and success in these activities. Our Squadron Sponsoring Committee generously provided the victors in each activity with gift cards to celebrate their successes and motivate future participation in the squadron. As we were unable to celebrate Christmas and the New Year in person, the SSC gifted each cadet a LEGO plane set, an act that was very much appreciated by all. It is so critical that we as a squadron remain positive and hopeful in such a time of uncertainty, so that the end remains near.

As the WO1 of 608, I have the opportunity to listen in on our Level 1 classroom, where our new recruits learn the basics of the cadet program and are able to experience the unique training and activities that come with being a cadet. Lessons on drill, leadership, citizenship, and aviation generally make-up a cadet’s first year, and it has proven to be difficult to deliver these expectations through a screen. Yet our group of dedicated recruits remain hopeful and interested, and these expectations have become a reality in the Level 1 classroom. Our hardworking seniors are so invested in the cadet program, which evidently has reflected onto the new recruits. We continue to be the role models that we once looked up to as we climbed the ranks, and seek to instill in the younger cadets our love for the cadet program and the opportunities it provides. It is especially important that we create an environment that is welcoming and engaging to the younger cadets, to ensure they remain hopeful and excited for the time we are able to meet and train in person.

With the implementation of extra-curricular activities, the virtual training program at 608 continues to grow. To help prepare our present and future Glider and Power Pilot candidates, a virtual Ground School is scheduled every Monday evening. This tool has proven to assist and motivate our candidates towards their success, and will soon be extended to all cadets who wish to broaden their aviation knowledge and make their possible dreams of flying a reality. Ground School, our first of many virtual clubs, is not mandatory, but provides the cadets with the opportunity to explore all areas of the cadet program. On Monday and Friday evenings, cadets are able to explore the various teams and clubs our squadron generally promotes. Whether it be Drill, Band, Marksmanship, Fitness and Sports, Orienteering, or Model- Building, these clubs will be open to all cadets, and will act as a basis for how they would normally run in-person. Not only will these clubs provide the cadets with the chance to engage in a team within the squadron, they will promote future participation in all aspects of the cadet program.

The cadets at 608 have remained dedicated to the Air Cadet Program, becoming accustomed to its values and its mission. As a squadron, we continue to focus on the development of our younger cadets and recruits, and our high participation and attendance rates are a result of just that. The pandemic has without a doubt created barriers, but the cadets at 608 are direct proof that anything can be overcome.