

# CAPital School Program



Photos by Sr. Mbr. Kamme Bond, New Mexico Wing

## CAP, National Guard Help Students Succeed at Sierra

1st Lt. David Braddi of the New Mexico Wing's Las Cruces Composite Squadron, cadets Chiane Bond and Alex Antholzner of the Sierra Middle School Cadet Squadron and Capt. Brian Morrison of the Rio Rancho Falcon Composite Squadron maneuver a glider on the airstrip.

*By Kimberly Wright Harper*

**T**he slogan of Sierra Middle School in Las Cruces, N.M., is “Sierra means success.” Unfortunately, despite her enrollment in Sierra’s sought-after magnet program, Chiane Bond wasn’t finding much success. She was

facing expulsion from the program because of her poor grades. Then she discovered the school’s CAP program.

“The Sierra Middle School Program helped me with my grades,” said Bond. “When I started in the program, I was a straight-F student. But today I have become an almost

straight-A student in all of my classes. I was amazed at how much the program helped me.”

Currently, more than 80 students are participating in the program, held during school hours as an elective class supported by the volunteer efforts of CAP members Capt. Deborah Martin and Sr. Mbr. Kamme

Bond. Two New Mexico Wing National Guard noncommissioned officers work with the students on physical fitness, leadership and military drill, and a CAP volunteer teaches aerospace education five days a week.

“They came to us a number of years ago, and we decided to work together, with excellent results,” said Lt. Col. Claude Luisada, group commander of the New Mexico Wing’s school program, which is tied to the New Mexico National Guard’s Counterdrug Task Force Program titled Reconnecting Youth.

The organizations first joined forces at Van Buren Middle School in Albuquerque, N.M., a school classified as at-risk because of the number of students coming from economically disadvantaged and single-parent families, and the prevalence of drugs in the neighborhood.

At-risk students are statistically more likely to have academic and behavioral problems, according to the U.S. Department of Education. But, thanks to the CAP cadet program’s leadership and citizenship training, students learn to rise above obstacles in their lives.

Based on the success at Van Buren, the program was brought to Sierra two years ago, where, according to officials with the Las Cruces Public Schools, 57.5 percent of the student population is classified as economically disadvantaged.

The impact of the CAP program on students is hard to miss. Kamme Bond said she noticed a remarkable change in her daughter. “Chiane

expressed interest, so I sent her there because they did free after-school tutoring. Immediately, she started showing improvement in her classes due to the fact Capt. (Deborah) Martin, the unit commander, and the sergeants would make sure she had her homework turned in and done correctly, and they tutored her, making sure she understood the work. Chiane also started making friends in CAP, something she had not been good at before. Chiane fell completely in love with CAP. I did also.”

“It has a very profound effect on students,” said Luisada. “Even within a couple of months, their behavior changes.” The students stay off of drugs and out of gangs, show more respect to themselves and others and develop a better work ethic, with a subsequent improvement in grades, as the program requires at least a C average.

“My favorite part of the pro-

gram is being able to learn how to fly the gliders out at the Las Cruces airport,” said Chiane. “I have been doing that for a couple of months now.”

“I find it extremely gratifying that these students are being inspired by the CAP cadet program to flourish as students, citizens and human beings,” said New Mexico Wing Commander Col. Frank A. Buethe. “Their maturity reflects positively upon themselves and the CAP cadet program in the eyes of their community, school and families.”

**N**ew Mexico has a proud school program heritage. The first CAP-sponsored middle school program was formed in 1991 at Wilson Middle School, just outside the gates of Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. According to Maj. Warren Johnson, who launched the program, this initiative was expanded to touch the lives of



Sierra Middle School in Las Cruces, N.M., boasts a CAP cadet squadron of more than 80 students.

Photos by Sr. Mbr. Kamme Bond, New Mexico Wing

“more than 200 students with two in-class programs and three after-school programs” thanks to the support of a plethora of agencies, including Kirtland AFB, the New Mexico Air National Guard, several veterans organizations, the Albuquerque Police Department and local high school JROTC programs.

Johnson’s lengthy, unpaid service in this program was recognized with C-SPAN’s Teacher of the Year award and a commendation in the U.S. Congressional Record. In addition, the students distinguished themselves by earning more than 25 \$10,000 scholarships to the New Mexico Military Institute and by

sweeping the National History Day Contest. Many of the cadets joined local CAP units, four earned glider wings and some also served as pages in the New Mexico Legislature.

**S**ierra Middle School counselor Kristin Knight said the CAP program helps students focus on what’s important.

“There is a natural pecking order among this age range,” she said. “When a student is not popular, it is generally due to something out of their control such as height, weight, socioeconomic status or perceived attractiveness. In CAP, a student’s rank is established by knowledge, skill, hard work and determination

— all things within a student’s control. How rewarding to know one can be high in the pecking order for things that are important and meaningful, such as leadership and goals.”

Thanks to the CAP program and the influence of CAP volunteers working in these schools, students like Chiane have a source of inspiration in their lives. “I now want to go into the Air Force, because I like Civil Air Patrol so much,” she said.

“CAP has changed my daughter’s life and my life drastically!” said Kamme Bond. “I couldn’t ask for anything better to happen to her.” ▲