

Leading by Example

National Commander Helps Launch Semper Vigilans Society

By Loretta Fulton

■ An expression that Maj. Gen. Mark Smith uses to describe a golden opportunity that shouldn't be missed is "ticket to the game."

By including Civil Air Patrol in his planned giving, Smith is providing a fistful of tickets to hand out to young people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to benefit from CAP's leadership and enrichment programs. He's pleased to be in a position to help financially.

"It makes a difference in the life of a young person," Smith said. "That's the beauty and the power of philanthropy."

Smith, who retired in 2000 after a 26-year U.S. Air Force career, will conclude his extended four-year term as national commander and CEO of Civil Air Patrol in August. Numerous advancements and improvements have occurred under his leadership, including the launch of the Semper Vigilans Society in 2020. The society was established to recognize those who include CAP in their estate planning.

Kristina Jones, CAP's chief of philanthropy, credited Smith with developing a philanthropic culture during his tenure. When he decided to make a lasting impact on CAP through planned



U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet 1st Class Ben Hook (left) of the U.S. Air Force Academy's class of 2019 and Civil Air Patrol National Commander Maj. Gen. Mark Smith point out Hook's newly added name on the plaque showing top-performing current and former CAP cadets in each academy graduating class since 1984.

giving, Jones wasn't surprised.

"It is exactly the kind of heart he has always had for our cadets and our amazing organization," she said. "We knew he wanted to lead by example."

In turn, Smith gives much of the credit to Jones and her development team for strengthening the CAP Foundation. Through new ideas from the team, such as the Semper Vigilans Society, the foundation is approaching the \$2 million mark.

"Without their hard work," Smith said, "none of this would be happening."

Semper Vigilans, Civil Air Patrol's motto, is Latin for "always vigilant" or "always ready." Planned giving to the foundation ensures CAP is always ready for the future. CAP's mission can be summarized as "saving lives and shaping lives," Smith said. Including CAP in estate planning will help ensure that continues.

Developing young people into competent,

confident leaders is especially important to Smith, who benefited as a youngster when he was aided in his dream of becoming a fighter pilot. The Air Force Academy liaison for the area where Smith grew up saw potential in the young man and assisted him in reaching his goal.

Smith was accepted into the academy and graduated with a bachelor's degree in international affairs. That experience made him realize the importance of good role models in the lives of young people.

"The power of mentorship is something that is really important to me," Smith said.

Today, he's in a position to help provide those mentors. He joined Civil Air Patrol in 2005, but after active-duty service that included Operation Desert Storm and commanding the Air Force's 27th Fighter Squadron, Smith wasn't sure he would be a good fit for a civilian organization.

But he fell in love with the people he met, and he saw a way to continue his passion for developing leaders.

"That was the hook that kept me in," Smith said.

Others who share his passion and have included Civil Air Patrol in their estate plan or are considering it should contact Jones at kjones@gocivilairpatrol.org.

"We want to collect these exciting stories about why people choose CAP with their generous planning," she said. "For those exploring options, we do have resources available to assist." ▲

An explanation of the Semper Vigilans Society and a step-by-step guide to becoming a member can be found at civilairpatrol.planmylegacy.org/semper-vigilans-society.



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