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FROM SOUTH JERSEY TO YOU

High school seniors earn salute en route to enlistment

By LAVINIA DeCASTRO • Courier-Post Staff • June 3, 2010

VOORHEES — Highland High School senior Eric Jacot dreams of a career in nuclear engineering, but he hasn't filled out a single college application.

The Blackwood resident plans to get his schooling from the U.S. Navy.

"They just seemed to have all the things I'm interested in," Jacot said. "It's good schooling and good money. What's not to like about it?"

Jacot was among 47 Camden County high school seniors who have chosen military careers and were honored during Wednesday's "Our Community Salutes" ceremony at the Mansion in Voorhees.

"We wanted to be the first to say thank you to these kids," said organizer Ken Hartman, a former Cherry Hill school board member.

Last year, the event attracted 250 people, including 47 high school seniors who enlisted. Each senior receives a commemorative coin and certificate.

Hartman said he had long wanted to recognize seniors who planned to serve their country, but could not find an organization that honored them.

"There wasn't a single school district in the county -- or in the state, for that matter -- that was doing anything to thank these kids and their parents," Hartman explained. "Everybody is doing their part to say thank you to these kids, some of whom will be going to war."

Kourtney Scott knew she wanted to be in the New Jersey Army National Guard when Winslow High School's ROTC cadets visited her middle school.

"They had an open drill you could participate in," said Scott, a Winslow resident. "I was the first to raise my hand."

Pennsauken High School senior Marc Eisenmann, who joined the Air Force, said simply it was "a

calling."

"At first, my parents were apprehensive," Eisenmann said. "They always thought I was college-bound."

With the U.S. involved in two wars, Gina Deas was upset when her son Kyri Chandler decided to join the Marine Corps.

"I told him, 'I don't mind if you're going to the service; I just don't want you to go in the Marines.' So when he said he was going, it felt like a punch in the gut," the Pennsauken mother said.

Deas says she didn't talk to her son for two days, but eventually accepted the idea when he explained his reasons.

"I want to be in federal law enforcement," said Chandler, a student at the Camden County Technical Schools.

Korean War veteran Tom DeCasere, of Runnemede, also enlisted at age 17.

"It's a nice gesture," the Army vet said of the ceremony.

"It's something we didn't have 50 years ago."

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Kourtney Scott, an ROTC member at Winslow High School, attends Wednesday's ceremony at the Mansion in Voorhees. Organizers honored 47 students who have chosen military service. (CHRIS LaCHALL/Courier-Post)

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