

Kadets count down to careers in television

Air Academy High School students practice various station roles

By **BRIAN NEWSOME**
THE GAZETTE

Surrounded by computer and video equipment, the staff at KDET-TV prepares for its morning newscast.

Kyle Ophein types text for the teleprompter. Station manager Kim Zuercher decides to run with a national story on NASCAR, but she calls for a preview — a “teaser” in TV talk — of a hot dog eating contest that will come later in the broadcast.

A few minutes later, the cameras roll and anchor David Hartwell reads the lead story: “For lunch today, we have chicken fettuccine and Alfredo.”

Students at Air Academy High School are producing a daily broadcast of announcements and other news on the school’s closed-circuit television.

The program is run by the high school’s digital media department. The school, in Academy School District 20, is one of only a few high schools in the country with such a department, said digital media/video coordinator Ryan Cameron.

Student reporters hit the

streets armed with cameras and microphones. They interview peers, students at other schools, and community members for stories. The news can be as simple as, well, what’s for lunch, or in-depth reports with multiple sources. Some students can spend more than 60 hours on a project, Cameron said.

Each day’s segment airs with a different theme. Monday, it’s the weather. Wednesday, students at other D-20 schools answer trivia questions, much like “Jay walking,” a regular feature on the “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno.” Students with the correct answers receive prizes.

On this day, Nov. 19, the theme is entertainment. The NASCAR story, about a proposed new track in Washington, fits the bill.

After the planning, Hartwell — he wears a suit, dress shirt and tie over his jeans and T-shirt — and co-anchor Heather Hope take their seats on the set. Zuercher, 18, counts down with her hand and points through the window.

“Good morning, Kadets, I’m Heather Hope.”

“And I’m David Hartwell with today’s news.”

It takes a few tries. The anchors stumble over a word or sentence and have to start over. At one point, Ophein, 16, scrambles to change the teleprompter text after a last-minute announcement is dropped by the studio. Late-breaking news, as Cameron would put it.

Eventually, the pair nail their lines, and another set of students huddle around a computer to begin the edit.

Some of the equipment, funded largely by grants, is as good as or better than that of local TV stations, Cameron said. The show is shot entirely in digital format. It’s then sent out in high-definition quality (school TVs, of course, are not high-definition).

Students train in different roles. A technical director one day may be an anchor the next.

Zuercher, a senior, plans for the program to help her build a career.

“I hope the experience will help me along the path of becoming a film director or screenwriter,” she said.

Since it began about six years ago, the student-run TV program has helped several students get internships or ca-

reers in television, Cameron said.

Cameron, who worked in TV news before becoming a teacher, strives for realism. Sometimes he’ll turn off pieces of equipment to watch how the students respond to the crisis.

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KRISTY ANN MANN, THE GAZETTE

IN 3-2-1: Station manager Kim Zuercher counts down in the control room as student anchors wait to record a segment of Air Academy High School’s KDET-TV on Nov. 19.