

## FLYING HIGH

### CIVIL AIR PATROL CADET EARNS TOP HONOR

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WEST HAWAII TODAY

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As a 12-year-old brand new to the program, Aiden Alvarez wasn't even sure he wanted to be a member of the Civil Air Patrol.

Fast-forward six years; in April, the now 18-year-old Cadet Colonel Alvarez of the Kona Composite Squadron has received the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program's highest honor: the General Carl A. Spaatz Award. Since 1964, when the award was created, Alvarez is just the 15th recipient of the Spaatz

Award in Hawaii's history.

What sparked such a turnaround? It was only after



**Cadet Colonel Aidan Alvarez of the Kona Composite Squadron was just the 15th member of the Civil Air Patrol in Hawaii to receive the Cadet Program's top honor: The Gen. Carl A. Spaatz Award. COURTESY PHOTO/WEST HAWAII TODAY**

his first trip to Oahu for a combined training school with all the other units from across the Aloha State when Alvarez finally became hooked.

"The first one of those I did was when I fell in love with the program," Alvarez said.

Civil Air Patrol turned out to be an ideal outlet for what Alvarez described as a shy, home-schooled child, and he dived in headfirst into the organization. Civil Air Patrol describes itself as a partner and auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, helping with search and rescue and providing support and training for youth 12 and older.

"It's really just focused on leadership development," Alvarez said of the Cadet Program. "They receive classes in aerospace, search

Spaatz Award.

Only awarded after passing a four-part exam, approximately one in every 200 cadets nationwide will receive the award. At the conclusion of the leadership, aerospace, character and physical fitness – the equivalent of the Air Force Academy entrance physical evaluation – tests, Alvarez became one of the elite few Spaatz Award recipients.

"Alvarez is the perfect embodiment of what a Spaatz recipient should be; someone who puts others needs before their own, leads by example and never stops fighting for the greater good," said 1st Lt. Tony Mitchell of the Kona Composite Squadron in a statement. "He is a true role model and we are excited to see what the future holds for him."

him is an ideal Alvarez hopes to have instilled in those who follow him, as well.

"That's a big thing that I was told going through the program, those leaders who tell me, 'I want to see you go further than me.' That's what I tell my students a lot of the time," Alvarez added. "That's really where we get our gratification, seeing our students go far and really grow into these amazing leaders."

As he looks toward transitioning from the Cadet Program to the adult program, Alvarez has his sights now set on a degree in human resource management at Western Governors University. The interest stemmed from his time organizing projects and activities within Civil Air Patrol.

and rescue, we do physical fitness training, military customs and courtesy. But our main goal is preparing them to enter adulthood with good life skills to apply to whatever career path they choose to enter.”

Cadets are eligible for promotions every 56 days, with 16 achievement awards and a total of five milestones, the last one being the

“It’s kind of surreal,” Alvarez said. “Other cadets who trained me and taught me leadership skills, two of them earned the Spaatz Award. It was cool to be on the same level as those who trained me.”

That mentality of reaching and surpassing the achievements of those who came before

“All of my CAP experiences – my project management skills from running these large-scale activities, as well as conflict resolution, all that stuff – is really what got me interested in doing human resources and management... It’s definitely set up to where you don’t have to have a military career; it will prepare you for whatever you want to do.”