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Contact: Ed Barker

850.452.5845
(DSN) 922.4858
(FAX) 850.452.4900

CID Sailors help inspire next generation of information warriors at Cyberthon

PENSACOLA Fla. -- Center for Information Dominance (CID) Sailors mentored local high school students in the inaugural Cyberthon competition Jan 23-25 at the National Flight Academy onboard Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola.

Hosted by the Blue Angels Chapter of the Armed Forces Communications Association (AFCEA), agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, businesses and organizations joined forces in a competition designed to test the students on their abilities to use computer skills they learned in their classrooms to defend and defeat cyber-attacks on websites.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Department of Homeland Security Office of Cybersecurity Operations and Programs, Greg Touhill said the goal of the competition is to leverage classes in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and energize the next generation of information warriors.

"Cyberthon is designed to put steam into STEM, and inspire these high school students to further develop their skills in information technology," said Touhill. "The competition also helps develop teamwork, leadership, problem-solving and communications skills; all things they can use as they continue their education and move into the workforce."

Sailors from the CID Unit at Corry Station volunteered to assist the Cyberthon Blue Teams (good guys) with defeating the Red Team (bad guys) attacks on the Blue Teams' websites.

"Mentoring the Cyberthon kids was a great experience for both us and the students," said Information Systems Technician (IT) 1st Class (SW) Carlos Garcia, IT 'A' School instructor at CIDU Corry Station. "These kids are the future of information warfare, and they were surprised to find out that the Navy is a significant player in the world of information dominance."

Randy Ramos, president of the local AFCEA chapter, was one of the main organizers for the event.

"We gathered a team of information technology experts to support the competition as Red Team members, and also as mentors for the students," said Ramos. "The volunteers from CID were invaluable in helping keep the competition going. It's also great to show the kids that there are a lot of future cybersecurity and IT job opportunities - ranging from businesses and education to the Department of Defense."

Angelo Mayorga, a Pine Forest High School freshman, said the competition helped him understand the broad range of talents and coordination needed to run an effective cybersecurity program.

"Before coming to Cyberthon, I thought it took only one person to combat a hacker intrusion," said Mayorga. "Now I know that it takes a team to monitor your website and defeat the attacks. I'm starting to think seriously about going to college to study computer technology and hopefully get a job in the field."

Capt. Maureen Fox, commanding officer of CID, commended her Sailors for volunteering their weekend time to help with the competition.

"It's great to not only partner with the community for such a significant learning event, but at the same time be able to share our professional expertise with the Cyberthon participants," said Fox. "To see these kids totally immersed in core STEM activities with mentorship from CID Sailors is very gratifying."

At the ceremony concluding the competition, the two Blue Teams were commended for successfully defending the weekend's constant barrage of cyber-attacks from the Red Team's industry professionals. All student participants in the competition were declared 'cyber warriors,' received recognition certificates and Cyberthon challenge coins. According to the AFCEA organizers, they are already planning for next year's Cyberthon.

For more information about the Center for Information Dominance, visit the CID website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil/CID>.

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Story by Ed Barker, Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs