

Cadet Joseph Cramer DiFrancesco

Happy Birthday, Joe!



Mentors come in all ages. One of my finest and most respected turns 21 this week. Happy birthday, Cadet Joseph DiFrancesco, Class of 2007, United States Military Academy! Joe, an Eagle Scout with 4 palms, OA Member and Venturing Bronze, Gold & Silver recipient, is my brother and my hero.

Someone once asked me about living in my brother's shadow. I explained a shadow cast by my brother has more light than anywhere on earth. He is talented at redirecting light and sharing it with others. He was always the polite one, respectful and quiet - a student favored by most teachers. The local newspapers repeatedly featured him in numerous articles. Joe was always the first person to receive the "good citizen award" each school year; I was never in that position.

I refer to Joe as "the perfect child" or "Fattycakes", depending upon the situation. Joe has been my protector, guide and best friend for as long as I can remember. I feel as if he has cleared and helped define my life path. Joe was a Venturer, so I tagged along, waiting until I was old enough to join. When Joe was 14, he was the only freshman on the Academic Decathlon team; I am now the captain of our state championship team. Joe began the Congressional Award when he was 16; I beat him to the gold - but only because West Point's rigors have commanded his time during the past three years. Next June, he will receive the Congressional Award Gold Medal in Washington, D.C. Other than Girl Scouts, Joe has introduced me to those things in life I value most (and he helped me with Girl Scouting for years!).

Joe's began Scouting as a Tiger Cub when he was in 1st grade at The Meadows in Las Vegas. He joined BSA Troop #192 in Ketchum, Idaho, in 1997. Our natural father, who did not support Scouting values, blocked Joe's attendance of summer camp his troop each summer. Not content to be left behind, Joe became an accomplished provisional Scout at camps like Emerald Bay, Sea Base (tall ships), Potosi, and Thunder Ridge, frequently serving as Senior Patrol Leader. He completed Philmont's challenging 21-day Rayado trek when he was 15 and eventually attended Marin Sierra and Bradley with his troop. Joe's creative approach to Scouting was evidenced in during the 2001 National Jamboree, when he served as youth staff in SCUBA. The youth with the highest SCUBA rank (Master SCUBA Diver), Joe offered assistance to those with less training and guided a paraplegic Scout on his first SCUBA experience.

Joe's Eagle project, creating a KID KIT program to fingerprint youth, collect vital information like DNA, weight, height, birthmarks, etc., has been reproduced within the community. The American Legion in Idaho selected him as Eagle Scout of the Year. A founding member of our Venturing Crew, Joe served as president of the crew while Junior Assistant Scoutmaster for the troop.

Joe was a senator in Boys State and worked as a page during the Republican state convention in Idaho. During high school, he ran cross-country, swam on a swim team, fenced, danced (yes - he was great at tap!) and was a leader in outdoor camping and survival skills. When he was a member of the Knowledge Bowl Team of his high school, they took state and went to the national competition in Washington, D.C. He attended the National Summit of Young Technology Leaders and earned numerous medals in Academic Decathlon.

Over the years, Joe's commitment to public service gained him recognition and honor. He was named the Ketchum Sun Valley Youth Citizen of the Year, and received community service awards from the Best Buy and Sawtooth Board of Realtors.

When Joe was in 5th grade, he defined his goal for college when he decided he would go to a military academy. After visiting West Point, he knew which one was right for him. Joe was fortunate in receiving nominations from Senator Craig, Senator Crapo and Representative Simpson.

At West Point, Joe chose the hardest of the majors: Life Sciences. He routinely tabs his APFT (gets above 90% on his fitness tests), received the "Hooah Award", earned the German Proficiency Badge and his Airborne Wings. For his birthday, Joe is running LA's Weirdest Biathlon - a 10 K run coupled with a business ethics presentation. Eclectic? Yes. Boring? Never!

What's next on Joe's Scouting horizon? After his birthday, he is joining our Council as its International Representative, looking forward to guiding youth as they explore the world.

I am proud and humbled to be related to this amazing man, my hero, Cadet Joseph Cramer DiFrancesco (AKA Fattycakes). Happy Birthday!!!