

## Virginia Rules Camp Grant Enhances Orange County Youth Academy

The Civic Engagement Committee's updated survey results reflect the popularity of civic engagement programs and activities that target students and youth. In Orange County, a successful way of engaging youth has been the Sheriff's annual Orange County Youth Academy. The program provides an opportunity for teenagers in Orange County to learn about Virginia law, participate in team building activities, and interact informally with local law enforcement personnel in a fun and healthy environment. This age group is targeted because the decisions they make can be so critical to their future.



Each year, the Sheriff's Office selects twenty (20) high-school students as Youth Academy participants based on a letter of intent, school standing and recommendations by the County's School Resource Officers. Orange County's Youth Academy for 2018 will include sessions on gangs, bullying, drugs and alcohol, teen violence, CPR training and firearm safety. The camp will also include Criminal Law Basics and an overview of the Sheriff's operations. The participants will take part in a tour of the Central Virginia Regional Jail, participate in several team building activities and enjoy recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, and rock climbing.

Although the Orange County Youth Academy first began in 2010 as an extension of the Sheriff's Citizen Academy for adults; in 2016, funding was received from the Virginia Rules Camp Grant Program for the first time which provided additional resources and instructional materials. Prior to that time, the program relied exclusively on fundraisers and donations. The Virginia Rules Camp Grant Program is available from the Virginia Office of the Attorney General to any Virginia sheriff's or police department with maximum awards of \$4,000 for up to forty (40) participants and \$5,000 for more than forty (40) participants. By incorporating the Virginia Rules Camp Grant Program with the Youth Academy, the Sheriff's Office has been able to provide a more robust agenda and been able to acquire specialty equipment (ex. impaired and distracted driving goggles), funding for park admission and other





recreational activities. The Virginia Rules website offers twenty-six (26) separate educational modules designed specifically for teens on various legal topics and how they apply to teens in their daily lives. The 2018 Youth Academy will be the third year in which several modules from the Virginia Rules curriculum have been included and grant funding has been awarded. For more information on the Virginia Rules Camp Program, please see <https://virginiarules.org/camp/>.

In addition to fundraising, donations and the above-mentioned grant proceeds, the County receives support for the program from several community partners including Walmart, Dominos, Sedwick Building Supply, Piedmont Power Equipment, the staff of the Central Virginia Regional Jail and the County's own EMS staff.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the program is having a positive impact in the local community.

One previous participant successfully performed CPR on a family member when the only training he had ever received was through the Youth Academy. At least one program participant is now employed as a deputy in a neighboring locality after having developed an interest in the career through his involvement in the summer camp. The program's continued success and widespread community support reflect a desire by community members to participate in their local government and to engage each other by forming healthy partnerships that enrich the quality of life in Orange County.

