

Gilmer Sheriff's Office hosts local CHAMPS graduations

by Whitney Crouch
wcrouch@timescourier.com

Around 300 Gilmer County fifth-grade students from Gilmer Middle School and North Georgia Christian Academy were recently awarded for their completion of the CHAMPS program (Choosing Healthy Activities and Methods Promoting Safety).

Launched by the Georgia Sheriff's Association and taught by members of the Gilmer County Sheriff's Office, the multi-week training program teaches students how to stay away from self-destructive behaviors and about the importance of making good choices. Topics of discussion include Internet safety, leaders and followers, hunting and firearm safety, choices and consequences and staying home alone, as well as the dangers of drugs, alcohol, bullying and negative peer pressure.

"(The curriculum is) very broad-based and informative," observed Capt. Mike Gobble, during the CHAMPS graduation ceremony at GMS Thursday, May 9.

As he addressed the

graduating students, Sheriff Stacy Nicholson added, "What you learn in CHAMPS classes will be some of the most important lessons you will ever learn ... we're happy we can put the program on for you."

Students who completed all of their assigned activities, which included an essay and poster, and who passed a final test were awarded with T-shirts, certificates, prize packs and a pizza party.

Special awards were also given to students who excelled on specific CHAMPS projects. The overall winner for GMS was Mati Teague, while Jared Wilmarth was

selected as the top CHAMPS student at NGCA.

At GMS awards were also given to the students with the top posters and essays. Prizes were awarded as follows in the essay competition: Caleb Waddell, first runner-up; Abigail Brock, second runner-up; and Rachel Bennett, third runner-up. These essays are found below.

In the poster category, Aniston Fowler was named first runner-up for her poster about hunter safety in regards to targeting stands; Chloe Hensley received the second runner-up title for her home alone

safety tips poster; and Marisa Boland earned the third runner-up slot for her poster about abductions.

"Gilmer Middle School's motto is 'to encourage, to educate, to empower.' Our CHAMPS program instills all three of these," Principal Larry Walker observed as he reflected on the benefits of the program. "We appreciate the efforts of Stacy Nicholson and our Gilmer Sheriff's Department for their continued support of CHAMPS in our school system. The kids learn life skills and really enjoy having the officers in their classrooms."



Photos by Whitney Crouch

Gilmer Middle School fifth-graders (bottom left) enjoyed their CHAMPS graduation May 9, while North Georgia Christian Academy kids (top) celebrated their completion of the program May 17. Above right, overall NGCA winner Jared Wilmarth is congratulated by Sgt. Greg Dotson and Capt. Mike Gobble. Above left, Dotson and Gobble are joined by Sheriff Stacy Nicholson, Dep. Misty Hensley, (front l to r) GMS poster winners Marisa Boland, Chloe Hensley and Aniston Fowler, Champ the mascot, overall GMS CHAMPS student Mati Teague and essay winner Caleb Waddell, Abigail Brock and Rachel Bennett.



Fifth-graders pen winning CHAMPS essays

In order to graduate from the CHAMPS program, participating students are required to complete an essay and poster on topics addressed in the course. The following essays were selected as the winners for Gilmer Middle School and North Georgia Christian Academy.

Internet safety

by Mati Teague

Overall Gilmer Middle School CHAMPS winner, fifth grade

It is important to stay safe online. About one billion others, besides you, use the Internet, so always stay safe. Internet was originally made for the military, but then others started using it too. Never say anything bad or mean about anyone, or anything, because their feelings, along with yours, could become hurt. Almost 100 percent of Internet users use the Internet for research.

Always keep personal information ... well personal! Don't give out your full name, email, phone number, address or location. Some users try to find people's personal information to abduct or steal them. This is wrong and illegal!

Social networks are where people go to see what others post; some examples of these are Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram, Etsy and Snapchat. Some users put bad comments on others pages; to prevent this, only add known friends to your friends list.

Always try your best to stay safe online, and keep others safe too! If someone else tries to be rude and find your personal information, print, copy, save or photograph it, then show it to an adult! Have fun and stay safe online.

Staying home alone

by Jared Wilmarth

Overall North Georgia Christian Academy CHAMPS winner, fifth grade

Staying home by yourself is a big responsibility. First, you need to know your house rules such as what can be turned on, what company is allowed and what you can and can't do. Secondly, you know what to do in case of

an emergency. The last thing is showing my mom and dad. The most important thing is to be safe.

House rules are very important. They let you know what your parents allow in the house. One of our house rules is no company when my parents are not home. Also, no cooking is allowed by yourself. No fighting with my sister is allowed because one of us could accidentally hurt one another.

We need a plan in case of an emergency. The family needs a code word and safe place to report to in case someone breaks in. Also if you have an alarm system you need to know how to use it. We all need to know when and how to call 911 in a real emergency.

The most important thing is to understand rules are used to keep us safe. If we show our parents that we understand home rules. It shows them we can be responsible.

Hunter safety

by Caleb Waddell

Gilmer Middle School CHAMPS 1st runner-up essay winner, fifth grade

Hunting is one of my favorite things to do. It is a great way to learn about animals, spend time with my dad and brother, and just have fun. However, using a gun or bow is a major responsibility and there are lots of safety tips you should follow to make sure you have a great day in the woods.

Some states require you to take a hunter safety course. This is a good thing to do even if it is not required in your state. Taking the time to practice shooting your gun or bow before you go hunting is also a good idea. Wearing bright orange while hunting is very important so other hunters will see you. You should also know where other hunters in your area are located. If hunting out of a tree stand, make sure your safety strap is secure. Always tell someone where you are hunting, so they will know where to look if you don't return.

The National Rifle Association has been the leader in firearms education since 1871. Some safety tips for gun handling that should also be observed when hunting include:

1. Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.
2. Always keep your finger off

the trigger until ready to shoot.

3. Keeping your safety on will keep you from accidentally firing.

4. Know your target and what is beyond it. Never fire at only sound or movement or in the direction where there might be people.

5. Hold your gun at all times. Never lean it against a tree.

6. Wear earplugs and shooting glasses.

My family hunts for the enjoyment but also for food. We usually go to our farm to sight our guns or bows a few days before we go hunting. I love to shoot skeet with my shotgun. I killed two deer this past Thanksgiving with a Browning 270. Deer jerky and fried tenderloin are my favorite. Don't forget to check the weather forecast before heading out on your adventure and do not hunt with someone who doesn't follow the basic hunting safety rules. Let's go hunting!

Alcohol

by Abigail Brock

Gilmer Middle School CHAMPS 2nd runner-up essay winner, fifth grade

This educational year in CHAMPS fifth grade has witnessed many important life lessons in case any ever occur such as child abduction, bullying and Internet safety, each including consequences whether good or bad. Each fifth grader has been assigned a task to complete an essay and a poster on any of their choices. According to my thoughts and knowledge, I suppose alcohol is an excellent subject to explain and help younger and older people acknowledge what can or will happen experiencing contact with it; for most times, it isn't the wisest choice.

People tend to look at alcohol in an acceptable fashion, causing them to think that it is appropriate to use it. Abusing it every day, many people don't realize what harmful things they are doing to their body while using this addictive drug. They use this drug for various reasons, such as to relieve stress, escape from problems or to fit in at social situations that may contain peer pressure.

The function of alcohol is increasing risk of health conditions, such as heart and liver disease. Impairing brain function, it also works directly on the central nervous system, and it

destroys brain cells, resulting in great degrees of brain damage.

Alcohol has many and some quite dangerous effects and can play sneaky tricks on one's mind. Some people become more violent, which sometimes increases crime. Many people like to drink and drive. Drinking and driving is very dangerous and illegal. A girl named Jacqueline Saburido was in a terrible accident caused by a man who was drinking and driving. A couple of people got killed, but Jacque survived only because of luck.

As you can see, alcohol isn't the best drug, in fact, no drug is good. Alcohol is addictive, increases risks of health conditions and can cause jail time or death. People choose beer, whiskey, wine, brandy and many others when you can simply have a glass of orange juice or water.

Make the best choice. Do what is right.

Safety tips for hunters

by Rachel Bennett

Gilmer Middle School CHAMPS 3rd runner-up essay winner, fifth grade

Hunter safety is the act of teaching people of all ages the practice of handling firearms safely. It is important to know how to be a safe and responsible hunter while enjoying the outdoors because each year hundreds of people die in firearm related accidents.

Most accidents could be prevented if hunters followed safety procedures. It is always a good idea to carry a first-aid kit and to let others know where you are planning to hunt. Children under 12 years old must be supervised by an adult while hunting. Hunters need to wear orange so that they can be seen. Hunters should never operate a gun while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The most important rule of hunting is to treat every firearm as if it were loaded. Hunters should carry their weapon down and keep the safety lock on. They should shoot at an angle instead of overhead. Target practice is a good way to help you become familiar with your gun.

Hunting can be fun. By practicing firearm safety, you can have a wonderful experience.