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*Meet the Cadets  
of Kingsway's Rising  
NJROTC Program*



Photos Courtesy of  
David Schuster

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*Meet the Cadets  
of Kingsway's Rising  
NJROTC Program*



BY MATTHEW RAPPA

There's a certain energy you feel walking into the Naval Science classroom at Kingsway Regional High School. It's early, but cadets are already wide awake, working on drill formations, reviewing uniform standards, or prepping for community service events.

These students aren't just earning academic credits — they're building character, sharpening leadership skills, and discovering the power of camaraderie through Kingsway's Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) program.

Recently completing its second year, Kingsway's NJROTC program has already achieved what takes many units three to five years: an "Outstanding" score on its Annual Military Inspection (AMI) and the prestigious Unit Achievement Award. That level of success doesn't happen overnight. It takes discipline, vision, and a team of driven young leaders.

## Forging Leadership from the Ground Up

"Building a program from scratch has been hard work, but the rewards are immeasurable," said Senior Chief **David Schuster**, Kingsway's Senior Naval Science Instructor. "The cadets run this program. I guide them, but it's their decisions, their leadership, and their teamwork that shape its success."

Every cadet in Kingsway's NJROTC program plays an essential role in its success — especially rising seniors Cadet Lieutenant **Evan Neal**, from Mickleton; Cadet Master Chief Petty Officer **Michaela Obiri-Yeboah**, from Mullica Hill; and Cadet Chief Petty Officers **Emely Ortiz Vicente** and **Conor Pedrazzani**, both from Swedesboro.



*Photos Courtesy of David Schuster*





David Schuster



Evan Neal



Michaela Obiri



Emely Ortiz



Conor Pedrazzani

Evan serves as the unit's Executive Officer and Drill Team Commander. In addition to overseeing multiple departments, he leads early morning practices and keeps the team on track. "NJROTC gave me direction in life," he said. "Now, I want to pursue a military academy or ROTC in college."

Third-in-command, Michaela has grown into a confident leader through her NJROTC experience. "I came into this introverted. Now I lead inspections, speak in front of classes, and push myself because I believe in our team," she shared.

The unit's Administrative Officer and Academic Team Commander, Emely plays a critical behind-the-scenes role. "We've put in a lot of hard work — teaching newer cadets how to drill, what they needed to study, and how to prepare their uniforms," she said.

Conor manages the unit's award records and leads physical training sessions. "What makes NJROTC special is that there's a place for everyone. We all contribute in different ways," he said.

### A Defining Moment

Preparation for the Annual Military Inspection is intense. Cadets rehearse uniform inspections, study naval knowledge, and develop leadership briefs. Emely coordinated records and created a presentation, while Conor helped cadets unfamiliar with drill gain new skills. Michaela noted that the success was a reflection of shared determination: "We started early, supported each other, and exceeded expectations."

The AMI success helped Kingsway earn its first Unit Achievement Award, placing the school in the top 20% of NJROTC programs in the region. They tallied nearly 50 points above the national average on their End-of-Year report — thanks to community service, academic excellence, scholarship totals exceeding \$250,000, and more than a dozen leadership awards.

"This group has set the bar high," said David. "Their teamwork is incredible."

*Continued on page 12*



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## More Than Just a Class

Ask any cadet what makes NJROTC unique, and the answer comes quickly: the bonds. “It’s a family,” said Conor. “Everyone has a place. We help each other succeed.”

Cadets rotate through physical training, STEM projects, leadership lessons, and community service. In one project, students built remote-controlled boats to understand force and buoyancy. Others organized park cleanups, supported school events, represented Kingsway at professional sports games, and more.

Evan noted, “Cards at lunch, running drill before school, prepping uniforms — we know how to balance fun and responsibility. NJROTC isn’t just something we do; it’s part of who we are.”

Cadets also find meaning beyond competition. For Emely, earning her first academic medal was a turning point: “It boosted my confidence and made me want to try harder in everything.” For Michaela, orienteering showed her a new kind of challenge: “It wasn’t just running. It was planning, strategy, and working with a team.”

## Balancing It All

Kingsway’s NJROTC cadets juggle sports, honor societies, theater, and rigorous academics. David supports that balance.



“I tell them to go out and enjoy everything that high school offers,” he said. “Leadership in this program makes them stronger in everything else.”

To participate in trips and promotions, cadets must meet academic requirements. Mentorship is built in. “NJROTC isn’t just preparing cadets for the military,” David added. “It’s preparing them for life.”

## Eyes on the Future

Plans for the 2025-26 school year are already ambitious: Kingsway will host the NJROTC Aerial Drone Championships for five states. There are also plans for overnight visits to the Coast Guard Academy in New London, CT, and the USS Constitution in Boston, MA.

Even those not heading for a military career walk away changed. “I was shy when I joined,” Emely admitted. “Now I speak up. I lead meetings. I’m open to anything the future brings.”

Michaela, who once planned to go straight to college, now sees military service as part of her path. Conor is still deciding but says the leadership skills he’s learned will guide him no matter what.



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"NJROTC helped me figure out who I want to be," Evan said. "And that's someone who leads, gives back, and never gives up."

### A Community Behind Every Cadet

Kingsway's NJROTC success is more than just uniforms and awards. It's about community: families cheering from the stands, classmates joining clean-ups, and school leaders supporting big dreams.

"This program doesn't just belong to the cadets," David said. "It belongs to the entire Kingsway community."

And if these first two years are any indication, Kingsway's NJROTC program is only beginning to chart its course — with the wind at its back and a team ready for whatever challenge comes next.



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