

Seagoing city is this sailor's home

By Steve Hendrickson
special writer

Dan Whalen lives and works aboard a seagoing city, the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk.

Whalen, 25, son of Jean Whalen of Farmington Hills, is a medical officer aboard the 80,000-ton ship

berthed at the North Island Naval Air Station, across the bay from San Diego.

"I enjoy working aboard the Kitty Hawk," says the Navy lieutenant-junior grade. "I'm the medical administrative officer on the ship. This entails making sure that the medical

department runs smoothly in every aspect."

When an air wing is aboard, the Kitty Hawk has a population of almost 5,000. Equipped with a hospital, dental clinic, post office, laundry, weather bureau, a radio and television station and retail stores, the carrier is self-sustaining and has all the comforts of home.

The flight deck is 60 feet above the water and has an area of 4.1 acres — enough to park 1,900 automobiles.

WORKING ON a ship the size of several office buildings is challenging, according to Whalen.

"Everything is a challenge in this job," he said. "Being on a ship with 5,000 men is like running a mini-hospital."

"I'm in a position where I'm constantly learning. It's a good feeling to take this new knowledge and use it to help people in need."

The Kitty Hawk is the second U.S. Navy ship to bear the name of the small North Carolina town, which Wilbur and Orville Wright flew the first heavier-than-air manned aircraft on Dec. 17, 1903.

The ship launches aircraft with the aid of four steam-powered catapults. Each "cat" can propel a 30-ton jet to a speed of 160 mph in just two seconds, launching at a rate of three

per minute.

WHALEN IS a 1979 graduate of Farmington High School. He entered the Navy in June 1983.

Bill, my older brother, paved the way for me to join the Navy," Whalen said. He's a lieutenant commander and was able to answer all my questions concerning the Navy. It made my decision a lot easier."

Whalen earned a bachelor's degree in business from Michigan State University and was commissioned in Detroit. He served at the Camp Pendleton Naval Hospital, Calif., before reporting to the Kitty Hawk in May 1985.

Whalen has made one western Pacific deployment aboard the Kitty Hawk visiting Kenya, Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

"I loved the travel," he said. "The ports we visited were very different. I will probably never see some of them again."

"I went on a safari in Mombasa, Kenya. It was like being in a 'Tarzan' movie. Something that's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Whalen plans to make the Navy a career.

"Hopefully, I can go to postgraduate school," he said. "I'll probably do two more tours at Navy hospitals and I hope to get a tour in Washington, D.C."



Dan Whalen serves aboard the USS Kitty Hawk, homeported in San Diego and shown above off the southern California coast.

Helping to boost state's birthday

Two Farmington Hills residents participated recently in training workshops for the Michigan Host program.

Cathy Orsini, who works at Dearborn's Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, and Lisa Blum, a sales manager at the Nova Hilton, were trainees.

The workshops were sponsored by the Automobile Association of America to honor Michigan's 150th anniversary — the Sesquicentennial Celebration. Up to 1,000 persons will be trained at workshops in the Detroit area through July.

"(Trainees) who have participated in the training program will be identified by the Michigan Host name badges, window decals and counter cards posted prominently for the convenience of visitors," said Gwen Coleman, who is AAA Michigan's coordinator for the program.

"This person-to-person visitor network system will provide valuable information and services to assist the visitor," she said.

Through this program — which will be used in Traverse City, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Marquette and St. Ignace — hotel employees, service station attendants, attraction

workers and others who work closely with tourists will become knowledgeable "Michigan Hosts."

Michigan history and facts, basic map reading, clear and concise direction-giving and instructions on how to use the comprehensive Michigan Host Information Binder are among the key elements of the training program, Coleman said.

The book, which is being donated by AAA Michigan to each participating business, outlines accommodations, attractions, dining facilities, entertainment, history, recreational activities, Sesquicentennial events and available transportation.

The workshops are staffed by trained volunteers, many of whom are retired AAA Michigan employees.

"Communities throughout the state have been provided instruction books on how to start the program in their areas," Coleman added.

For more information, other interested persons should write to: Michigan Host Coordinator, One Auto Club Drive, Dearborn 48126.

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