



Appalachian Challenge Advantage

Kentucky National Guard Youth Challenge Program Academy Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2026 VOLUME XXVIII ISSUE II



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IMPORTANT DATES

Cadet Virtual Family Days:
28-29 March

Commandants Cup:
30 March—April 3

Artemis FTX
26-28 April

Cadet Virtual Family Days #2:
28-29 March

ACCLIMATION GRADUATION



The transition from Candidate to Cadet begins not only the introduction to greater privileges but also greater responsibilities, and greater opportunities. As each of the Candidates raised their right hand and stated the Cadet Oath, part of which they pledged to “never accept anything less than my best”. It is with this oath each was accepting the challenge ahead to be a Cadet aimed to the full completion of the program here at the Appalachian Challenge Academy and a lifetime of focus on their success.

DIRECTORS BRIEFING



Executive Director of the Department of Military Affairs for the State of Kentucky, BG (R) Charles T. Jones. BG Jones spoke to the Candidates about life, choices and the desire to make today a better day than yesterday. We Thank You BG Jones for your motivating words to the Candidates and your leadership.





The conclusion of the Acclimation Phase ushers in the true essence of the Youth Challenge experience. These newly minted Cadets have persevered to triumph the Acclimation Phase's initial (2) week introduction to a quasi-military life, and has poised these young men and women for the journey ahead. Acclimation is a preparation and launching point to showcase the life changes that only Youth Challenge can evoke, securing that the mission of the program has been activated. From meeting new friends, to instruction on facing movements, these few weeks serve as a true learning opportunity. The next (18) weeks will be a journey that will inspire, lead, and direct the (114) cadets who achieved the right to become an Appalachian Challenge Academy Cadet. Class 028 cadets will begin the pathway towards academic goals, meeting physical training standards, and holistic character development that only seemed but a dream on their initial Intake Day. As each Cadet embraces the challenge ahead, they are positioned to take control of their future, evoke their own potential, and embark on a transformational journey that few options compare. Join us in congratulating these young men and women who now make up Class 28 of the Appalachian Challenge Academy.



Structured Routine

Showing Cadets the Value of a Daily Schedule

| Time | Activity |
|------------------------|---|
| 0600-0800 | Wake Up, Morning Hygiene Routine, Cleaning Details Breakfast Chow |
| 0815 | Morning Formation (also known as "Reveille") |
| 0830-1500 1130-1230 | Classwork/Weekly Community Service Lunch Chow |
| 1500-1600 | Prepare for Physical Training (PT) Snack Chow |
| 1600 | Evening Formation (also known as "Retreat") |
| 1615-1700 | PT, Recreational Time, and Drill and Ceremony |
| 1700-1800 | Dinner Chow |
| 1800-2030 | Cleaning Details, Showers, Study Time, Mail Call, Letter Writing, and Quiet Time |
| 2100-2200 | Lights Out |

Our cadets are introduced to a rigorous schedule while attending the ACA which is detailed in the graphic above. From morning to night, a cadet's day is carefully planned to ensure all their needs are met and tasks are completed with room left to relax after their hard work is done. We find that providing youth with such a routine introduces them to time management skills and further benefits them by demonstrating that "I don't have the time" is never an excuse with the proper planning. We encourage cadets to continue making daily schedules when they return home to help make time for homework, exercise, and their other responsibilities.

FACT

Because we are a quasi-military academy, we utilize military terminology in our day to day operations.

Words like "chow" (meaning meal time), "lights out" (meaning bedtime), and our use of military time are just a few examples.

When M E W E Becomes W E

The Platoon Structure

When Class 028 began, our cadets were placed into the platoons that will act as their peers, family, and team over the next 5^{1/2} months. Our Academy is comprised of 3: 1st Platoon Spartans, 2nd Platoon Knights, and 3rd Platoon Gladiators. Each platoon is divided into 4 squads. The number of squad members varies by the number of cadets in each platoon. A variety of our cadets' daily activities are determined and completed by squads to sharpen their teamwork skills and build a sense of comradery!

Within their platoon, a **cadet** will have the opportunity to master their Leadership/Followership Core Component. The first available leadership position offered to cadets is **squad leader**. Squad leaders are responsible for ensuring cleaning details are completed and that uniforms are to standard within their squad. All cadets will complete a week as a squad leader to test their leadership skills and learn the challenges that come with supervising their peers. The remaining cadets will act as squad members to learn how to be followers and take orders from their peers in the squad leader positions. **Platoon sergeant**, or "PG" is the next leadership position available. The platoon sergeant acts as a liaison between the cadre staff and platoon. They will communicate orders and information, control cadet movement during the daily schedule, and will report accountability of their platoon during formation. For cadets that show exemplary leadership capabilities, additional positions are offered.

Teaching cadets to recognize and respect the authority that comes with being a leader is a crucial because it helps them recognize to respect the effort dedicated to achieving those roles while allowing them visualize what it takes to earn those roles themselves. For many cadets, mastering the skills of being a leader and a follower will be a challenging task. However, learning to inspire their peers while also mastering the ability to be

a team player is a skillset that will help each cadet when they go on to join the workforce, participate in group or team activities in school, and more.



Taking Action

Creating a Post-Residential Action Plan



ADVICE



SUPPORT



MOTIVATION



DIRECTION



TRAINING



COACHING



SUCCESS

With the long-term success of cadets in mind, helping them to create a sustainable foundation for their future is of the utmost importance. This means we do not shy away from preparing cadets for the sometimes adverse nature of the real world, but instead, focus on preparing them to have the capacity to work through any obstacles they may face in the future. And one of those lessons is that no matter what they face in life, they do not have to go through it alone.

Many cadets find that the aspect of the program they most admire is the newly developed support system they've received outside of their existing family and friends. This support system is not by accident but is, instead, an integral piece of all Youth Challenge programs. We recognize the value a community of support has for young individuals. Whether those values are the broadening of a cadet's horizon or creating accountability in their lives, it also reminds our cadets that there is always someone in their corner rooting them on.

One of the ways this support system shows up is through our Post Residential phase. Our staff Resource Advocates are responsible for helping to cultivate a support system for each cadet once they have completed the program and help to monitor their personal goals and well-being through monthly contacts. With use of the MentorPro App and other contact methods each program graduate and their Resource Advocate are in regular contact to help see success in their daily lives and ultimately see those successes add up to real and lasting victories.

In preparation for this Post Residential phase of the program, starting in Week 4, cadets attend a weekly "Post-Residential Action Plan" (PRAP) course. In this course, cadets will create goals using a SMART Goal framework (pg.8) that they will maintain throughout the Residential and Post-Residential phases. It is far more than words on paper or lofty ideas as each cadet has the support mechanism not only while here at the ACA but with that regular contact with our Resource Advocates for the 24 months following their graduation from the program.

Working SMARTer,

Not Harder



The SMART Goals framework is designed to create goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. In other words, it creates goals that are made to be accomplished. During PRAP, cadets will use this framework to establish short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals. Once the cadets graduate, their mentors will work alongside them to monitor and encourage the completion of these goals.

S

SPECIFIC

Clearly define the goal

M

**MEASURE-
ABLE**

Create measurements to track the progress of your goal

A

ATTAINABLE

Ensure the goal is within your abilities to reach

R

RELEVANT

Set a goal that is realistic and pertinent to your needs

T

**TIME-
BOUND**

Establish a reasonable timeline to complete your goal

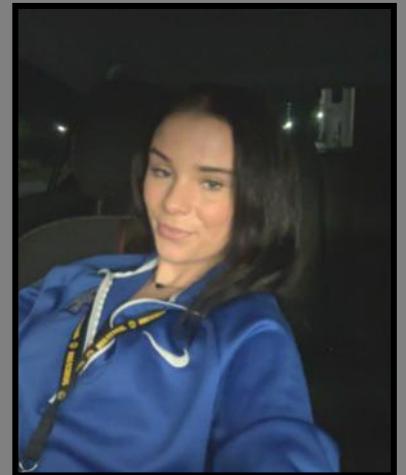
4 years out



My name is Skylar Segraves, and I attended the Appalachian Challenge Academy as part of Cycle 020. Before arriving at the Academy, I was fighting silent battles with myself and refusing to accept any help offered to me. I found comfort in running away, drug use, and other self-harming and reckless behaviors that were damaging me both mentally and physically. Because of the choices I was making, I eventually found myself in group homes, foster care, and even spent an entire Thanksgiving, birthday, and Christmas inside a juvenile detention center. I felt like I had hit rock bottom. I felt unforgivable, and I believed there was no way out of the life I had accidentally created for myself.



That changed when my mom discovered the Academy. I was terrified and convinced it wouldn't help or change anything. But upon my arrival, even though I was scared of what was ahead, I tried to keep a positive outlook on this new environment. The first couple of weeks were the roughest as I adjusted to the routine and expectations. Over time, though, I found myself excited for what was coming next. I looked forward to my favorite chow days, learning new marching techniques, and hearing stories about the big Artemus trip and Blackhawk ride we all heard about. With the help of amazing teachers and my sergeants, I was also able to complete my sophomore year while at the Academy.



Eventually, graduation came — and so did the tears from me and my friends who wished we could stay just a little longer. When I returned home, I came back with a new attitude, a healthier body, and a more positive outlook on life. I had been given the support, advice, and coping mechanisms I needed to face anything that waited for me beyond the Academy. I left with the satisfaction of completing the program and the realization that I was stronger and more capable than I ever thought I was.

Fast forward to present day I am 75% completed with my bachelor's degree in criminal justice. I also work 2 jobs, and am anxiously awaiting my 21st birthday so I can apply for the Kentucky State Police Academy! I found a passion for helping teens who may be struggling like I was, as well as protecting my community as a whole. I strongly recommend the Appalachian Challenge Academy because I am certain that accepting the challenge saved my life and gave me purpose again.

Skylar Segraves Class 020

Recruiting News

Now Accepting New Applications for Class 029

Meet our Recruiting Admissions Team

Spring 2026 Orientation Dates

All times are from 3pm to 7pm

Somerset Holiday Inn

50 Stevie Lynn LN

March 23

April 13

May 4

May 26

June 15

London Holiday Inn (exit 38)

506 Minton Drive

March 24

April 14

May 5

May 26

June 16

Lexington Holiday Inn

(exit 108 Hamburg)

1976 Justice Drive

March 25

April 15

May 6

May 27

June 17

Florence Holiday Inn/

Cincinnati Airport

1055 Vandecar Way

March 26

April 16

May 7

May 28

June 18

Williamsburg Hampton Inn

(exit 11)

530 KY 92

April 3

May 8

May 29

June 19



Rusty Bailey



Dexter Day



Eric Gray

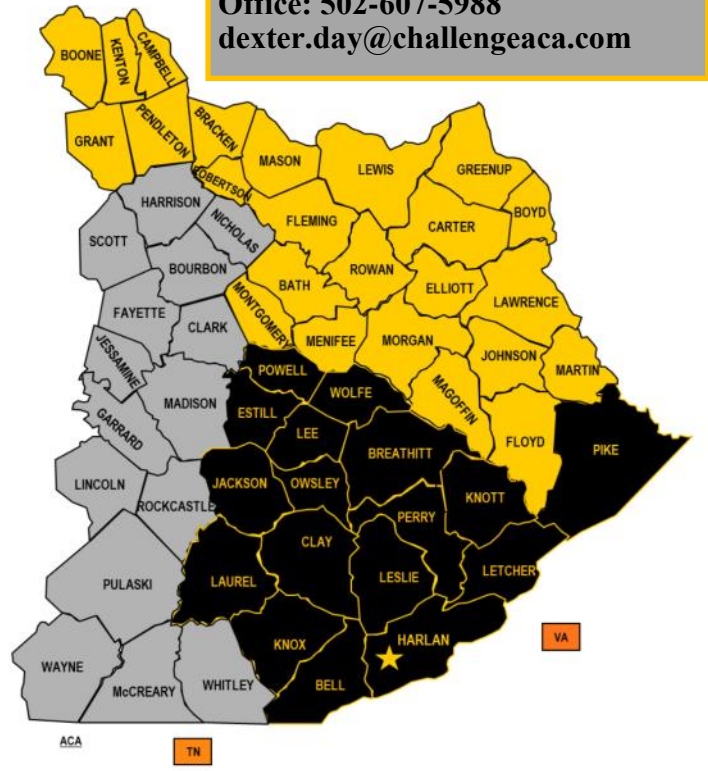


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IT'S GOING TO BE EASY**

**WE'RE TELLING YOU
IT'S GOING TO BE WORTH IT!!!**



ENROLLMENT NOW OPEN



CLASS 29 STARTS

JULY 12, 2026

DREAM

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF & NEVER GIVE UP!

BELIEVE

THINK POSITIVE & ALWAYS GIVE YOUR ALL

ACHIEVE

ALWAYS ENCOURAGE & DREAM BIG!

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.2ABETTERME.COM

f FACEBOOK.COM/ACAHARLAN

Instagram INSTAGRAM.COM/ACA4CHANGE

The Appalachian Challenge Academy is a 22 week, quasi-military program dedicated to advancing foundational development of regional youth. With a focus on 15^{1/2}-18 year olds, it is our goal to provide a diverse skillset through our Eight Core Components that will prepare them to successfully transition into adulthood and create the future they set their sights on. If you would like more information or are interested in joining our community of support, feel free to contact us.

Appalachian Challenge Academy

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