

"More Than Meets The Skies"

This is the new catch phrase for the US Civil Air Patrol. Because we are more than flying. Way more. Emergency Services, Aerospace Education, the list goes on. With that we begin a new era in Public Affairs. We begin to utilize the newest tools to recruit new members. The goal? A 10 percent increase in membership over the next year and by 2011 the target is 25 percent. How will we do this? YOU, the Public Affairs Officer.

Three PAO's from Texas attended the first ever Public Affairs Academy in Atlanta, GA August 6-8, 2007. Maj Joe Ely Carrales, 2006 Texas Wing PAO of the Year, Capt Arthur Woodgate, Group III PAO and Capt Denise Thompson, Group IV PAO and Texas Wing PAO of the Year for 2005. We came away with fresh ideas and good solid information to help our program grow and inspire the rest of the Wing.

We PAO's are the tools to get the word out. No longer will we say we are the best kept secret. There are 940 PAO's in the United States, over 35 here in the Texas Wing alone. When you say Civil Air Patrol to someone not familiar with our program, they think "flying". With our relief efforts in the recent hurricanes and locating lost people we can begin to give examples of our ES programs, cadet training, etc.

How will we get this started? The internet is a tool we use everyday. How many squadrons have a web site? Probably most of you reading this. The question for you is- Who is your target audience? Who do YOU want to recruit into your squadron? If you are a composite squadron, talk to your cadets. Find out where they are surfing, what sites they and their friends visit most often. Youtube is a hot site these days. Go to myspace.com and type in "civil air patrol" in the search area. How many of your cadets have an ipod? Ask them if they know about pod casts.

Have a senior squadron and want to attract more pilots? Try a blog. What are blogs, pod casts and you tube? Ask around your squadron. Chances are there is at least one member who can help show you what its all about.

We were given so many new ideas!! This is a small part of what we were given in Atlanta. We covered crisis management, handling the media and much more. We will be presenting this information at an upcoming PAO workshop to be announced soon.