

## North Point JROTC instructor Brown named state Crystal Apple Award winner

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Lt. Col. Jonathan Brown, a U.S. Air Force veteran, has been named the 2019 Crystal Apple Award winner. The American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Maryland awards the honor for excellence in teaching.

He was the American Legion Harry White Wilmer Post 82 Auxiliary's finalist for the state title and will receive the state award later this month at the auxiliary's convention in Ocean City.

Brown has been a JROTC instructor at North Point High School for several years and runs the course with retired Chief Master Sgt. Ruth Wilson and retired Lt. Col. Linda Ray. North Point has an Air Force program of the Junior Reserves Officers Training Corps with about 200 students enrolled in the elective.

### A tradition of service

Brown comes from a military family with his dad and brother both serving in the U.S. Army.

"It was a natural thing to do," said Brown about enlisting.

A member of the Army JROTC in high school, Brown earned a ROTC scholarship to Mississippi State University where he majored in computer science. When he graduated in 1984, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force where he entered the information technology field.

His first assignment was at the Pentagon. From there he was stationed in Germany and traveled to places like Prague, England and Czechoslovakia. He was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia and in Omaha, Neb., before becoming a college ROTC instructor for four years at the University of Arkansas.

After returning to the Washington, D.C., area, he retired in 2007 from a 24-year Air Force career.

### Navigating a new career path

The late Col. Donald Wade, a longtime member of the Board of Education of Charles County who was instrumental in bringing the JROTC program to Charles County Public Schools (CCPS), was a mentor to Brown. Wade was assigned as the commander and professor of aerospace studies at Mississippi Valley State University — Brown's alma mater — where Wade established and operated the AFROTC.

"I never thought about being a JROTC instructor," Brown said, but he found himself helping out with North Point's JROTC program. When the instructor of the school's program was preparing to leave, Brown took the job. There was an adjustment period at first.

There are differences between the military way of doing things and the civilian way, Brown explained. "You're coming from an environment where whatever you said, people did it," he said. "You have to adapt to your environment and pick up a new skill set, learn how to speak to people differently."

That difference is also apparent between college ROTC programs and those operating in high schools. In college, the program is developing students to become military officers, they are preparing to enter the service. In high school, the curriculum focuses more on shaping students into better citizens and individuals, who have no obligation to join the military. High school students learn leadership skills, teamwork and engage in physical fitness while taking the elective. "There's a lot of opportunities for personal development," Brown said. The program appeals to a range of students from athletes to artists to those on a career and technology track.

The Air Force provides the lesson plans, books and other materials for the program. Many students take the elective because they are interested, others sign up because their parents suggest they do.

However they arrive in his classroom, Brown said if a student buys into the program, they will see the benefits. "I see the change; I see the growth," Brown said. "If they are engaged in the program daily, we see the impact it has on the student."

### Commitment to community

The Air Force JROTC is a student-led program, Brown said. "We're fortunate to have great students who are leaders in the school," he said. They can be counted on to represent North Point well. If an event is taking place at the school and VIPs are set to visit, "The ROTC is going to get a call," Brown said.

"Lt. Col. Brown's commitment to serve our community is amazing," Daniel Kaple, North Point's principal, said. "Lt. Col. Brown, his fellow JROTC instructors and his students, proudly represent our school and our country when they are called to serve our community. The NPHS JROTC program is a permanent fixture at any school event. When they are asked by our community to take part in a ceremony or event, they eagerly report for duty."

The students appreciate Brown's guidance. "He is very experienced and knowledgeable about how much we can do," said Chandler Bell, a North Point senior.

"He holds us to his expectations," added junior Skylar Jones. The expectations have led to North Point earning high praise from organizations outside of CCPS.

North Point's program has won many accolades and awards over the years including those collected at drill competitions and other contests. This year, the program earned the Distinguished Unit Award with Merit following an evaluation by the Department of the Air Force. The group also earned the Distinguished Unit Award and the Outstanding Organization Award. The awards recognize the work done by cadets and the contributions of the instructors. North Point's JROTC earned an overall rating of "exceeds standards" — the highest rating a unit can obtain.

"Lt. Col. Brown possesses all of the traits and characteristics of an outstanding educator," Kaple said. "His work ethic is unquestionable; his commitment to our students has no time limitations."

Past CCPS Crystal Apple Award winners include Kerri Loyd, Andrea Hoover, Caitlin Kelty, Caitlin Westhall and Suzi Hahn.

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