

DECURION

“Decem”—Latin for “ten”—lends its name to *Decurion*, a group of Cadets who, under the supervision of MAJ Chandler Whitney, learn the basics of construction with a generous dose of community service thrown in for good measure! Whitney organized *Decurion* in 2002 because, as he says, he was interested in tools and building things and deduced that some of the Cadets might share his interest, one that he’s had since childhood when he took his toys apart and rebuilt them.

This is not a random group, however. Cadets are recommended by faculty and selected on the basis of grades, behavior, responsibility, honesty and maturity. A Cadet may be tapped at any time during the year but there are seldom vacancies.

Decurion, like intramural sports, meets at the end of the academic day. And, because it meets at during that time, membership in *Decurion* limits participation in sports. Cadets in *Decurion* are limited to two other sports, but may rotate *Decurion* with a third sport while retaining “honorary” membership in *Decurion*. If the sport is seasonal, such as soccer or tennis, the Cadet may return to active status when the season is over. Few opt for the honorary inactive membership, however, preferring the bond of brotherhood and the sense of purpose afforded them by *Decurion*. Cadet Roberts, tapped in 2004, said, “*Decurion* is special to me because we get a break from everyone else and do what guys like to do.” Cadet Edwards concurred: “Building things and blowing up others is a ‘guy thing’ and this is a male school.”

And what do guys like to do? In 2003, *Decurion* built a paintball arena on the campus, an area now enjoyed by all Cadets in hours of play. First semester of the 2003-04 school year saw the completion of a “trebuchet,” a type of catapult. They tested its power by launching bowling balls and buckets of sand. Building the trebuchet taught *Decurion* members principles of geometry and how to predict trajectory—an aspect that particularly attracts Crusader Carver. “Being part of *Decurion* allows me to learn how objects work. The experience (of building projects) ... taught me to think ahead!”

Members of *Decurion* perform community service projects as well—such as building a handicap ramp for a wheelchair-bound senior in Natchez. They have also done projects beneficial to the Academy, such as wiring McKenzie Hall (faculty apartments) for cable TV, telephone and internet, and by building a “sandbox” map that depicts the Wilderness Program area.

What’s next? The Cadets themselves generate new ideas; sometimes Whitney as faculty sponsor comes up with something. The current project is a cannon that will use the compression of gases from dry ice to launch a projectile. It, like the other projects, will teach basic construction skills, principles of safety, careful use of tools and a sense of cooperation and camaraderie. Most of all, according to Crusader Senseman, “*Decurion* builds self-confidence, maturity and responsibility.”

