

Eye doctor becomes angel for cadet's flight dream

BY JASON BRUDERECK

READING EAGLE

Holly Madden wanted to begin applying to flight school in the spring, but the junior in the U.S. Coast Guard Academy had a problem.

"You need 20/50 uncorrected vision, but mine isn't anywhere close to that," said Holly, 20, a Spring Township native.

To wait to have her vision corrected by surgery in the Coast Guard would take years.

She explained her situation to Dr. Jonathan D. Primack, a corneal specialist and surgeon at Eye Consultants of Pennsylvania, Wyomissing. He offered to perform her surgery for free, saving her thousands of dollars and years of waiting.

"He was incredibly generous," Holly said.

Primack examined Holly while she was home for Thanksgiving with her parents, Joseph T. and Gail E. Mad-

den of Spring Township.

He deemed her a good candidate for photorefractive keratectomy, a type of laser surgery known as PRK that was more common before LASIK was developed. The military requires PRK over LASIK for its personnel because there is less possibility of damage to the cornea, Primack said.

Holly's surgery is scheduled for mid-December when she is home from the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn., where she is majoring in civil engineering.

She recently earned her jump wings (a parachutist badge) while at the U.S. Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs, Colo., this semester as part of a military exchange program.

The Wilson High School graduate was inspired to apply to the Coast Guard academy partly because her sister, Ann E., enlisted in the Coast Guard and underwent basic training in Cape May, N.J.

Ann drowned in January 2008 at

the age of 19 while trying to rescue her boyfriend and their dog from rough surf near Sonoma County, Calif.

Holly, who wants to be a helicopter pilot, is not guaranteed a spot in the joint Coast Guard-Navy flight school in Pensacola, Fla. Only seven of 210 Coast Guard Academy graduates were selected last year.

There are 240 cadets in her class, which is scheduled to graduate in May 2012. If Holly isn't selected, she will be assigned to a Coast Guard cutter as an engineering officer.

No matter what, Holly's eyesight will be much better, Primack said.

"She has a 95 percent chance of having 20/20 vision or better," he said. "We're happy to do that for her."

And the surgery will allow her the chance to pursue her dream.

"Dr. Primack is my flight school angel," Holly said. "I can't believe he would do this for a total stranger."

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Dr. Jonathan D. Primack of Eye Consultants of Pennsylvania, Wyomissing, examines Coast Guard Academy cadet Holly Madden, a Spring Township native. Primack will perform surgery at no charge to improve her vision so she can qualify for flight school.

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