

# South Dakota National Guard

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Guard partners with Character Counts to recognize students**

Story by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen  
SDNG Public Affairs Office

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Soldiers from the South Dakota National Guard Counterdrug program teamed up with Character Counts to recognize Southwest Middle School students for their citizenship characteristics May 3 in Rapid City.

For the past seven months, the SDNG has been a partner with Character Counts and Southwest Middle School. Character Counts is an educational framework for teaching universal values and a national coalition of organizations that support each other. The program follows six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, citizenship, caring, fairness and responsibility.

“Each month we have 12 students who are recognized for displaying behavior that represents one of the six pillars of character,” said Kelli Muck, school counselor. “Citizenship is the pillar for the month of April. The teachers nominate students who they feel best represents citizenship.”

The students were honored in front of their peers as their names were read aloud and the reasons why their teachers chose them as a student of great character.

“Many times, students who are doing the right thing and are following the rules don’t realize how much their teacher appreciates them,” said Muck. “They can’t just stop class to compliment the student, so this is a neat opportunity to recognize them.”

Sixth-grader Madison Petty, daughter of John and Michelle Petty, of Rapid City, was one of the students nominated by teachers for obeying the rules, respecting authority, finishing homework on time and cooperating with classmates. Petty displayed all of the qualities that make up the citizenship pillar.

“It really made my day and made everyone feel special to know that the teachers pay attention to more than just bad behavior,” said Petty.

The Soldiers then presented the students with a certificate, a military dog tag with their name engraved on it and a U.S. Army Values coin.

“The coin is a tradition that is used in the military to award Soldiers for excellence,” said Col. John Holter, director of operations for the SDNG, as he talked to the students. “We have our own values that we follow, which are very similar to the six pillars of Character Counts. I encourage you to put it in your pocket; that is where I keep mine and every time I reach into my pocket I am reminded of the Army values.

Holter reminded the students that the traits in the Character Counts programs are great for their future success.

“It is important to do these things in front of your teacher and peers,” he said. “However, what will really make you successful in high school, college and your career is to continue to do these things when no one is looking, and that will make you a really great person.”

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**120503-A-CW157-001:** The South Dakota Army National Guard’s Col. John Holter (middle), director of operations, along with Master Sgt. Kristi Palmer (left) and Maj. Robert DeJong, both from the SDNG Counterdrug program, explains the significance of presenting military coins to students at Southwest Middle School May 3, 2012, in Rapid City. The Counterdrug team presented the Army Values coin to 13 students for displaying the traits of the Character Counts citizenship pillar. Character Counts follows the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, citizenship, caring, fairness and responsibility. (SDNG photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)



**120503-A-CW157-002:** Southwest Middle School student Roger Sheets, is awarded a customized military dog tag for displaying the traits of the Character Counts citizenship pillar from Maj. Robert DeJong and Col. John Holter, both members of the South Dakota Army National Guard, at the Southwest Middle School, May 3, 2012, in Rapid City. The South Dakota National Guard Counterdrug program teamed up with Character Counts to recognize Southwest Middle School students for their citizenship characteristics. Character Counts follows the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, citizenship, caring, fairness and responsibility. (SDNG photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen) (RELEASED)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Please contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail [pao@sd.ngb.army.mil](mailto:pao@sd.ngb.army.mil).