

## “Finding the Perfect Fit” at West Point Boot Fit 2012

By: Jessica Olson, NYCPM Class 2014

On July 2, 2012, a group of NYCPM faculty and students packed up and headed north to the 8<sup>th</sup> annual West Point Boot Fit at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point for a four-day volunteer experience. The goal of our visit was to properly fit over 1,200 new cadets with new boots for their military training. This highly anticipated event affords faculty and students the opportunity to travel to West Point and individually evaluate each cadet to ensure that the boots they are issued are specific to their individual foot type, in order to prevent injury and overuse problems that may arise during their training. West Point Boot Fit 2012 was led by Col. Michael Neary, DPM, MBA, Chief of the Podiatry Service at Keller Army Community Hospital, and Michael J. Trepal, DPM, NYCPM’s Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean. Additional participating faculty included: Robert A. Eckles, DPM, Russell G. Volpe, DPM, Susan M. Rice, DPM, Loretta L. Logan, DPM, and Jose Loor, DPM.



NYCPM West Point Boot Fit 2012 volunteer corps

Student volunteers included: Shawn Braunagel, Ari Arash Changizi, Lee Greenberg, Adam Kaplan, Robin Lenz, Adisa Mujkic, Erin Roberson (Class of 2013), and Joseph Bauer, Corey Bess, Terence Yu-Ching Chi, Mina Hanna, Melissa Hurwitz, Pooya Lashkari, Heather Leeb, Jared Menchin, Jessica Olson, Jalpen Patel, and Chelsea Viola (Class of 2014). Also joining our group was NYCPM Board Vice-Chair Maj. Gen. William F. Ward, Jr., A.U.S. (Ret.).

Upon arrival at the U.S Military Academy at West Point, we were immediately in awe of the pristine campus nestled in the beautiful Catskill Mountains of New York. The student volunteers had the unique opportunity to be housed in the barracks along with the current



cadets, and once our bags were unpacked, we explored the campus and the quaint surrounding town of Highland Falls, NY. Companies of uniformed cadets were seen marching and performing various drills throughout the campus, while the new cadets were seen preparing for their significant Reception Day (R-Day) Oath Ceremony. The feeling of pride and duty permeated the air, and it did not take long for one to realize the magnitude of history, honor, and respect that lie within the walls of West Point.

The following morning began with the official kickoff to Boot Fit 2012. Faculty and students first teamed up to organize the countless pairs of boots, and then reported to their respective stations. When the cadets arrived, we greeted each of them and assessed their foot type, any abnormalities they might have, and then determined the most appropriate type of boot for each of them. In order to ensure a “perfect fit”, cadets were asked specific questions regarding the feel of their boot and adjustments were made accordingly. Some cases proved to be more complex than others, but by the end of the first day of Boot Fit 2012, over 600 thankful new cadets had been individually seen and issued their appropriate set of boots.



Adam Kaplan (2013)

To mark the end of our first successful day, Col. Neary graciously arranged a sunset dinner cruise for all of the volunteers. With a stunning backdrop of the Catskill Mountains, students, faculty, friends, and family relaxed and shared stories, laughs, and memories over food and drinks while cruising the Hudson River. Gen. Ward



Dr. Logan, Dr. Volpe, Dr. Rice, Col. Neary

provided commentary about West Point and its history during the boat ride as well as during the Boot Fit experience. Additionally, the well-known editor of *PM News and Podiatry Management magazine*, Barry Block, DPM, JD, joined us as an invited guest and was able to partake in the boot fit experience and dinner cruise. A good time was had by all, and this proved to be one of the most memorable and enjoyable parts of the Boot Fit 2012 experience.

With the 4<sup>th</sup> of July falling in the middle of the trip, the student volunteers had the unique opportunity to spend the holiday on the West Point campus. To celebrate, students went on a campus tour with a “Firstie”, and he detailed the typical daily life of a cadet. We also went swimming in the on-campus lake (complete with a water slide!), watched the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade in the small town surrounding the campus, and had a barbecue with SGT Adam Wells on the boat dock while watching the fireworks. Having the chance to experience the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at one of the most highly revered military institutions in the country will long be remembered.



Thursday, July 5, marked our second day of fitting the cadets. We met, evaluated, and issued boots to another 600 cadets. Our NYCPM volunteer corps worked together seamlessly at a rapid pace to ensure that every cadet was seen and fit properly. Col. Neary and the NYCPM faculty members were key in keeping the operation running efficiently by fitting cadets and offering their expertise and guidance to the hardworking students on the more complicated cases. After the final cadet was fit for his pair of boots, everyone involved agreed that although

fitting over 1,200 cadets with boots was physically demanding, the appreciation expressed by the cadets made our time and effort worth it. We witnessed firsthand just how instrumental the role of a podiatrist is in keeping our service men and women “on their feet”.

Other notable highlights from West Point Boot Fit 2012 included eating in the historic Grant Hall with the current cadets, visiting the official Cadet Shop, and being allowed on the coveted



Shawn Braunagel (2013)

field of Michie Stadium (the official football field of West Point). One of our own NYCPM students, Shawn Braunagel

(2013), a former collegiate football player, even managed to successfully impress all of us by kicking a 40+ yard field goal on the turf!



Faculty volunteers: Dr. Volpe and Dr. Rice

Overall, for many of the NYCPM student volunteers, the West Point Boot Fit 2012 proved to be one of the most memorable events to date in our podiatric training. The student volunteers gained more experience than they could have ever imagined by working alongside our dedicated and knowledgeable faculty. Also, looking forward, Col. Neary and members of the NYCPM community are currently developing a research design to be implemented at West Point that will collect and analyze data on the various foot types and common podiatric conditions found in this population. This research will provide a solid basis for advancing and refining the podiatric treatment for our service men and women.

Finally, along with learning the application of various podiatric modalities to high-demand military training, there was one other important message all the volunteers took home, and that is, “Go Army, beat Navy!” Thank you to all of the volunteers for dedicating your time and talents to West Point Boot Fit 2012. It would not have been possible without you!



NYCPM West Point Boot Fit 2012 volunteer corps at Michie Stadium