

LONG ISLAND / TOWNS

William Floyd pair juggles prom, courtship with military



Danielle Tartaglione, 17, the current NJROTC commanding officer at William Floyd High School, attends her senior prom at The Inn and Spa at East Wind in Wading River with Jeff Gao on June 6, 2014. Gao, 19, is a 2013 William Floyd High School graduate who is entering the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md. Photo Credit: Marlo Jappen

By Marlo Jappen

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Jeff Gao wore his white Navy uniform as he escorted girlfriend Danielle Tartaglione to the William Floyd High School prom at The Inn and Spa at East Wind in Wading River Friday night.

Evenings like these are especially precious for a couple with rather challenging roads before them. William Floyd senior Tartaglione, 17, has enlisted in the Marine Corps and will begin boot camp on July 28 in Parris Island, South Carolina. Gao, 19, graduated from William Floyd in 2013 and will report to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., on June 29.

The couple met through the Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at William Floyd. NJROTC is a four-year program that students enroll in as freshmen. It gives students an early military education, but doesn't require them to commit to military service.

— Both Gao and Tartaglione were drawn to NJROTC because it offered them exciting extracurricular activities such as drill team. But they didn't start dating until the summer after his 2013 senior prom.

"It's easier for me to be with someone who's in the military rather than someone who's not because of the mindset we share," Gao said.

Tartaglione said she was shy, but her experience as NJROTC commanding officer at William Floyd helped her to grow as a leader. For Gao, he said the program has made him more organized and given him more dignity.

As for their relationship, they've managed to work around school and military commitments. They went to Peru on vacation after he graduated from the Naval Academy Preparatory School.

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military life.”

“I wasn’t expecting to go to prom,” said Tartaglione, who managed to make up the schoolwork she missed while vacationing with Gao so she could graduate on time and make it to prom night.

Gao is glad it all worked out.

“I’m enjoying prom,” he said. “It’s a break from

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