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Army Corps of Engineers Completes Covid-19 Alternative Care Facility on St. Croix

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ST. CROIX — The conversion of the 210th Regional Training Institute at the Virgin Islands National Guard Compound on St. Croix into an alternative care facility (ACF) for Covid-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) patients has been completed, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has announced.

Representatives from several local and federal agencies gathered to witness the handover of the 210th Regional Training Institute from the Virgin Islands National Guard to the Government of the Virgin Islands, FEMA said. This new ACF conversion project will support the Department of Health and will augment the local hospital's capacity.

“We hope we do not need to use this alternate care facility, but it is nice to see our collaborative efforts come to life in such a short time,” said Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

Brig. Gen. Kodjo Knox-Limbacker, the adjutant general of the Virgin Islands National Guard, has been steadfast in his efforts to remain ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure troops and assets are ready and available to support the territory, according to the FEMA release.

“We will continue to always be there and always be available,” said Knox-Limbacker. “One team, one fight, we will continue to support the requirements. I thank everyone in this room for coming together to make sure that we have something for when the call comes, we can meet the need.”

Based on the projection of the peak of the virus and the number of care facilities on St. Thomas and St. Croix, part of the first floor of the facility at the Estate Bethlehem compound has been retrofitted with negative-pressure rooms and hospital fixtures that accommodates two patients per room.

FEMA’s Federal Coordinating Officer, William L. Vogel, expressed gratitude to the construction company staff for their assistance with getting the ACS ready to serve the USVI. FCO Vogel was pleased with the coordinated efforts that went into the completion of the facility and the Territory’s ability to now care for COVID-19 patients if needed.

During Friday’s walk-through, both the US Army Corps of Engineers and Conti Federal Services showcased the remarkable 20-day transformation efforts of the first-floor to a 24-bed, negative pressure, acute care patient facility. Besides building the negative press system for each room, they also completed a full nurses station with call-down capability, pharmacy storage station, ice machine station, PPE donning and doffing stations, hazardous waste material storage station, patient care station, patient transport walk-way and an oxygen tank storage area. Additionally, repairs and full system tests were completed for the emergency fire suppression system, cistern water filtration system, and emergency backup-generator.

“We’re grateful that all the efforts that were implemented early on slowed our outbreak down enough to give us time to retrofit this alternate care facility and to increase capacity. Our goal to flatten the curve has paid off,” said Territorial Epidemiologist Dr. Esther Ellis.

On St. Thomas, constructions are still underway to add 50 beds to the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital with negative pressure rooms. The ACF construction build-out is a joint responsibility of the local and federal governments, with the federal government providing 75 percent of the necessary funding.