

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Employer Support Of Guard And Reserve Recognizes Deserving Employers

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Committee for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve held its annual St. Croix Awards and Recognition Dinner at the Buccaneer Hotel on July 1, where multiple companies that employ servicemen and women were recognized.

"We are here tonight to recognize an equally impressive and deserving group. The employers of our community that make the Guard and all of their greatness a possibility," said Kimberly McCollum, St. Croix Chamber of Commerce president and keynote speaker of the event.

At this year's dinner, the businesses were thanked and several ESGR awardees were showcased. The 2017 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award nominees and semi-finalists were also highlighted, and for the first time, the event included Patriot Award presentations.

The Patriot Award recipients were Felicia Neale and Elizabeth Thurland. Neale, from the Virgin Islands Army National Guard, was nominated by Capt. Paul Adjohda of the 662nd Quartermaster Company. Stanley Jones, vice-chairman, VI-ESGR presented the certificate and pinned Neale in the absence of Capt. Adjohda, who was unable to attend.

The second Patriot Award recipient, Elizabeth Thurland from the Virgin Islands Lottery, was nominated and pinned by Staff Sgt. Henrietta Sampson of the Virgin Islands Air National Guard, 285th Civil Engineering Squadron. An emotional Thurland thanked Sampson and VI-ESGR after receiving the certificate.

"Sampson is an exceptional worker and an exceptional service member. I know how it is to serve. I have military in my family," said Thurland. "I appreciate Henrietta very much and all that she goes through. I would also like to thank ESGR for their work, and everyone should continue supporting the men and women who serve."

This year, support for the men and women who serve was exemplified by the 14 awardees honored by the VI committee. Awards given included Seven Seals, Above and Beyond and the Pro Patria Awards.

The committee's most distinguished local award, the Pro Patria Award, was presented to Home Depot Store 8622, St. Croix. Home depot demonstrated the greatest support to the National Guard and Reserve by honoring deployed service members and their families, providing gift baskets, issuing water during military parades and assisting with the refurbishing of a veteran's home.

The committee celebrated the accomplishments of two employers by presenting the Above and Beyond Award to the Virgin Islands Public Employees Relations Board and La Reine Chicken Shack. This award recognizes employers who have gone above and beyond the legal requirements of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. PERB offers additional benefits to its Guard employees, and La Reine Chicken Shack annually offers free meals to military service members.

Eleven Seven Seal awardees were honored by the VI committee. The Seven Seals Award is the broadest and most inclusive award given by ESGR.

VI-ESGR honored businesses who offered specific services to guard members, assisted the committee with spreading the mission of ESGR, employed service members and provided military discounts. This year's St. Croix recipients were Bougainvillea Perfumaria, Kmart Frederiksted, Working for the Betterment of the VI, Gas City, Dial Rent to Own, Karibbean Kutz Barbershop, Marion Petersen, Jennifer Johannes-Bass of Home Depot Store 8622, Maj. Marise James, Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Delores Edwards, and Staff Sgt. Akimo Lionel.

Culminating the event was the presentation of the nominations for the 2017 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. This year eight Virgin Islands employers were nominated for the annual Freedom Award, with three being nominated as semi-

finalists. Virgin Islands Freedom Award nominees were Virgin Islands National Guard, Governor Juan F. Luis Hospital, Home Depot Store 8622, Virgin Islands Port Authority - St. Thomas, and Virgin Islands National Park – St. John. Semi-finalists were Virgin Islands Department of Health, Virgin Islands Public Employees Relations Board and Comprehensive Security Concepts, Inc. – St. Thomas.

ESGR's end goal is to have all employers support and value the employment of members of the National Guard and Reserve in the United States and its territories, thereby increasing the readiness of the reserve components.

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