

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Coast Guard Takes V.I. Public Behind The Scenes Of Academy Training Aboard The Eagle – ‘America’s Tall Ship’

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THOMAS – Being in the U.S. Coast Guard Academy is just like going to college except for the fact that school days start before dawn and the emphasis is on exceptional military basis, said Third-Class Cadet Alexander Mastel Friday.

After waking up at 5 a.m., the typical freshman has to complete his or her assigned chores and then head to morning formation. A formation is a gathering of all the cadet units and a time to share information and have uniform inspection. Next on the schedule is breakfast, after which follows a military training period.

According to the 20-year-old, the day still isn't over.

There are regular classes from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and later, from 4 to 6 p.m., the athletic period begins. Everyone is required to pick up a sport that they will practice during the athletic period.

Dinner and homework take place after that.

While training at the academy isn't easy, cadets who make it through the highly-selective application process don't pay any tuition and have the opportunity to attend a school that U.S. News and World Report ranks as number two in Regional Colleges North and number one in Top Public Schools (<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/coast-guard-academy-1415>).

Mr. Mastel took VIC through a day in the life of a freshman, or fourth-class cadet, while



Cutline: Julie Bentz, 18 (left); Kyle Frey, 19

(center); Geoffrey DeLorie, 19 (right) are third class cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn. To complete their first year training, they sailed aboard the Eagle to St. Thomas - the first of seven Caribbean and Latin American destinations on their community outreach tour.

Part of training for cadets who've completed their freshman year at the academy is to spend five weeks aboard the 295-foot three-masted barque.

While onboard the only active sailing vessel in the U.S. government service, they get hands-on experience in areas such as celestial navigation, technological navigation, and damage control. The third-class cadets are typically trained by first-class cadets and enlisted members of the Eagle's permanent crew.

Many of the less-experienced cadets came to the academy straight from high school, but by the time they complete training on the Eagle, their growth is evident.

"It happens every day when they finally go 'Oh, I learned that in the classroom, and it makes now!' " said Eagle Captain Matt Meilstrup Friday. "They have responsibility, and it's real – it's not answer some phone somewhere. It's [that] you're responsible for all our lives so you need to do your job, and that makes you grow up pretty quickly."

For Julia Bentz, the hardest part of training aboard the Eagle was overcoming a first-timer's fears. But she's been able to witness her own growth since.

"I was afraid of climbing. I was afraid of getting hurt by something, but you learn to open up to all of that, and you learn to work around that," the 18-year-old said.

Another aspect of cadet training while on the Eagle is community service. On May 12, their crew of 180 men and women departed from New London, Conn. for St. Thomas – the first destination on their outreach tour. They arrived here on Friday.

Cadets aboard the Eagle will take part in several community service projects while in port.

These include a behind-the-scenes tour on the Eagle with JROTC members from the Ivanna Eudora Kean and Charlotte Amalie High Schools on Saturday. Austin Callwood, the local outreach coordinator from the V.I. Centennial Foundation and 340 Group VI, hopes the tour will enlighten the students on all the options they have post-graduation.

Members of My Brother's Workshop and Boy's and Girl's Club Marine Vocational Program will also take part in the tour.

That same day one group of cadets and youth from the local entities will participate in a Coki Beach clean-up and recreational activity at the Coral World Ocean Park. Another group will be laying wreaths on Veteran's gravesites at Western Cemetery as part of the Memorial Day weekend remembrance. Cadets and local young people will also enjoy a visit to the Piratess Treasure Museum in Havensight while in port.

Public tours of the Eagle are free. Civilians will be able to board the vessel at the West Indian Company (WICO) dock during the following times:

Saturday, May 26: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Sunday, May 27: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

During their 2018 summer patrol, the Eagle crew will also enjoy port calls at other Caribbean and Latin American destinations including Barbados (June 1 – 4), the Dominican Republic (June 9 –12), Puerto Rico (June 15 – 20), Honduras (June 29 – July 2), Colombia (July 9 – 12), and Curacao (July 15 –18).