

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Local Parents Of U.S. Coast Guard Officers Get Glimpse Of Cadet Training

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THOMAS – While the crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Eagle primarily came to the territory to offer community service and a glimpse of what training at the USCG Academy looks like, their visit here has meant so much more to the local parents of past cadets and active officers.

Friday was Ana Foster Torres's first time aboard the Eagle although her son, Lt. Luis Garcia, graduated from the academy in 2009. Garcia, a graduate from the St. Croix Educational Complex, now works as a civil engineering and statistics instructor at the USCG Academy.

Being able to get a peak into her son's prior cadet training and to meet his students from the academy made Mrs. Torres feel proud.

"It's kind of amazing because they're all telling me, 'He's my favorite teacher'," she said. "I don't know if they're saying that, or if he really is, but I think he's a really cool guy."

While he'd seen the Eagle many times while visiting his son in New London more than ten years ago, Friday was also Randolph Thomas's first time aboard the Eagle. His son, Lt. Cmdr. Nkosi Thomas, is a 2008 graduate of the academy and a graduate of the Charlotte Amalie High School.

"I remember when he was there one night he called me, and he said, 'Hey Dad! You wouldn't believe where I am. I'm about 200 feet up on the Eagle, and the wind is blowing, and the sea is a little rough, and I know you would love to be here'," the older Thomas said.

The tallest mast on the ship is actually 147 feet high, and Thomas got to witness other cadets climb it, like his son did, on Friday. Thomas believes that more V.I. youth need exposure to training like this so they can have the opportunity for success like his son and other Virgin Islanders.

"We have so much talent here," Thomas said. "Our young people are our greatest talent."



Myron James – father of Virgin Islander Lt. Jevon James – shares similar sentiments. According to James, the Coast Guard doesn't get as much credit as it should. He thinks it's worth exploration from young people in the territory.

"The Coast Guard is an underrated branch of the military. I mean, they do so much, and most of their missions are not broadcasted like the others. They're not really thrown into battle when they have a conflict, but when there are diplomats, when there are storms, or rescuing to be done, they call on the Coast Guard," he said. "I would encourage youngsters to get into it."

USCG Academy cadets have the opportunity to complete a college degree while concurrently training for military service. Once they make it through a highly selective application process, they're awarded a scholarship valued at more than \$300,000, which covers the cost of their tuition.

The Class of 2021 includes cadets from 43 states plus the District of Columbia, Germany, Guam, Ireland, Japan, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to a news release from 340 Group VI, LLC.

Part of training for cadets who've completed their freshman year at the academy is to spend five weeks aboard the Eagle, a 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.

They also participate in a community outreach tour while aboard the Eagle. 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 – using the stars as their navigation guide.

They've been involved with a number of community service activities, including public tours of the ship, this weekend with the help of 340 Group VI, LLC and the non-profit Virgin Islands Centennial Foundation.

Public tours of the ship continue today from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the West Indian Company Dock.