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Youth Challenge Academy explores careers at base

Dec 28, 2011: LAKEHURST, NJ –The Naval Air Warfare Aircraft Division Lakehurst (NAWCAD Lakehurst) Educational Outreach Office recently joined forces with the New Jersey Youth Challenge Academy (NJYCA) to provide its high school students with a mind-altering, vocational-expanding experience. “Our goal is to foster a robust continuum of exposing, learning and considering career opportunities in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) for students of all backgrounds and educations,” said Education Outreach Coordinator Gaetan Mangano.

The Lakehurst Educational Outreach Office provided the opportunity for these students to visit the base in small groups to demonstrate how math and science are used to develop and test new products in support of Naval Aviation.

“The goal was to show a wide variety of potential opportunities,” said Mangano. “Presenters linked their work to careers elsewhere to open the students’ eyes to what is possible in their own vocational futures, maybe to ignite a dream.”

Students of the academy, called Cadets, live at Ft Dix sites for twenty-two weeks without computers or cell phones in a “boot-camp” style atmosphere. Cadets rise at 5:00 a.m. and go until 9:00 p.m. every day studying math, science, social studies, and English along with challenging physical training, career counseling, mentoring and structured activities.

“The academy provides a highly disciplined environment fostering academics, leadership development, physical training and personal growth. It educates and trains unemployed youth who have ceased to attend high school. Those that apply to this volunteer, fully-funded academy are looking for a second chance.” says Victoria Ragucci, the NJYCA director.

Already, over one hundred Cadets have toured a wide spectrum of the joint base facilities through the outreach program. They watched seasoned machinists grind naval aviation steam catapult launch valve assemblies to within tolerances of a fine Swiss watch (one-thousandth of an inch) at the manufacturing, prototyping and testing facility.

They climbed on-board a simulated derailed train piled on cement rubble at New Jersey’s Urban Search and Rescue training grounds. They watched burgeoning chefs at the Ocean County Vocational Culinary School and witnessed history being made as workers built a state-of-the-art hybrid Army airship called the Long-Endurance Multi-Intelligence Vehicle (LEMV).

Finally, Cadets climbed into a vintage Huey H-1 helicopter at the US Army Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center as part of learning about aviation careers.

“Vocationally, this is a day these Cadets will not forget, as they have been shown a wide variety of options to open their eyes to what’s possible in their vocational future.” said event coordinator, Wil Borkowski. “Our Lakehurst Educational Outreach Office already has provided many local schools the opportunity to visit so we could demonstrate how math and science support of Naval Aviation.”

Cutline: New Jersey Youth Challenge Academy Cadets visiting the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division’s manufacturing, prototyping and testing facilities, located on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, examine aircraft carrier launch components machined to very fine tolerances prior to meeting those responsible for such precision work necessary for critical aircraft launch reliability.

Cutline: New Jersey Youth Challenge Academy Cadets take flight controls of vintage Army Huey H-1 helicopter as pilot and co-pilot as part of learning about aviation and support careers at the US Army Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center located on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

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