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Virgin Islands Educators Support Families of Deployed Troops

By Rudi Williams
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ATLANTA, July 8, 2005 – The U.S. Virgin Islands don't have any active duty military installations, but Army and Air National Guardsmen and their families can boast of living in America's Caribbean paradise with breathtaking beaches, secluded coves, pristine coral reefs and untouched rainforests.



Three U.S. Virgin Islands territorial youth coordinators attended the recently completed Military Child Education Coalition 7th annual conference in Atlanta, seeking ways to better serve families, particularly children, of deployed National Guardsmen and Reservists. From left are Evelyn Glasby, Virgin Islands territorial youth coordinator; Arlene Schjang, the lead youth group coordinator on the island of St. Croix; and Tracey Thompson-Johnson, the lead youth group coordinator on the island of St. Thomas. Photo by Rudi Williams (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

This U.S. territory also can boast of having caring and compassionate support for citizen-soldiers and airmen fighting the global war on terrorism and the loved ones they leave behind.

"The services we render are to children and family members of the Virgin Islands National Guard, particularly those who are deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan," said Evelyn Glasby, the U.S. Virgin Islands territorial youth coordinator.

Glasby attended the Military Child Education Coalition's 7th annual conference here that ended July 1.

With her was Tracey Thompson-Johnson, the lead youth group coordinator on the island of St. Thomas, and Arlene Schjang, the lead youth group coordinator on the island of St. Croix.

The Virgin Islands Army National Guard maintains two armories, one on St. Croix and the other on St. Thomas, separated by 40 miles of water. Soldiers live on four islands: St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island. The distance from St. Thomas to St. John is three miles. The Air Guard has its facility on St. Croix.

Virgin Islands Army and Air National Guard units received training in Iowa, Kansas, Alaska, Alabama, Minnesota, South Carolina, Florida, Germany, Puerto Rico and at home stations during training year 2005, according to Sgt. 1st Class Karen Williams, the Guard's Virgin Islands public affairs officer. She noted that the Army and Air National Guard come under one umbrella known as the Virgin Islands National Guard.

Williams said there are 768 Army National Guardsmen and 64 Air National Guardsmen in the Virgin Islands. Sixteen soldiers from the 620th Quartermaster Water Purification Company and an aviator are deployed to Iraq, 48 soldiers from the 652nd Engineer Detachment, an Air Guardsman and a headquarters soldier are deployed to Afghanistan, and 45 soldiers from the 640th Quartermaster Water Purification Detachment and 610th Water Supply Company are deployed to Haiti. About 90 members of the 610th and the 640th are slated to deploy to the Middle East in the fall, Williams said.

"We have a lot of kids whose parents are deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti," Glasby noted. "We're preparing our kids for the deployment process, as well as preparing our soldiers to be processed out in the fall. The kids and families, as a whole, are being prepared for deployment."

Glasby said conferences like MCEC provide a wealth of information. "What makes our atmosphere a little different is the fact that we live on islands and we don't have the luxury of going to facilities on military installations," she noted. "But we do have a wonderful dynamic team back home, including our adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Eddy Charles, who supports all of our events and youth programs." Glasby said she gets a lot of support for families from the Veterans Affairs Department, the American Legion and organizations for retirees from the active and reserve components.

Schjang said the organization's two territories being on separate islands can pose a challenge.

"When we're having functions, we have to make sure that we're able to bring one group of kids from one island to the other island," Schjang noted. "You have to have money to get them from one island to the next, because you can't just drive from one location to the next. We can take a boat, seaplane or a regular plane. It takes about 20 minutes on an airplane, 40 minutes on a seaplane and an hour and a half on a boat."

Johnson said an annual territorial workshop brings teenagers from both territories together for activities that relate to the military and other subjects that affect them.

"We might have a session on self-esteem, a topic that leads to educational growth, or topics that affect young people," Johnson said. "Or may be topics on coping with parents or coping with the pressures of teenagers - basic general topics that impact teenagers. They have a great opportunity to interact and for them to have some fun with other teenagers from another island."

This summer's territorial workshop, Glasby said, will feature members of a commercial company that specializes in military personnel services. "They'll be using modules for separations, deployments and different aspects of the deployment avenue," she said.