



News Release

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ECBC Partners with National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academy to impact youths' lives

Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. — The U.S. Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC) will continue its tradition of supporting community outreach this winter as the Center's Advanced Design Manufacturing (ADM) Division helps provide real-life job skills and experience to participants in the Maryland Freestate ChalleNGe Academy located at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

The Maryland Freestate ChalleNGe Academy, a tuition-free program that aims to provide 16-through 18-year-old at-risk teens with skills, education and self-discipline necessary to succeed as productive citizens, was created in 1993 as part of the the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program (ChalleNGe). As one of the original 10 states to embrace ChalleNGe, the State of Maryland's formed the Freestate ChalleNGe Academy through a cooperative agreement between the Maryland National Guard and the National Guard Bureau.

In order to graduate from the program, cadets must successfully complete each of Academy's eight core components. As a part of the Job Skills component, the ADM Division will host two class sessions this year that will help cadets develop technical and functional job skills that they can apply in a workplace setting, following their graduation from the program.

"These are kids who have had a tough time in life and for one reason or another have been kicked out of school," said Mark Schlein, chief of the ADM Division. "As a last resort, they can apply to a program like this. Many apply, but only a few are selected."

Academy organizers first expressed an interest in partnering with ECBC in 2002. ECBC Engineering Associate Director Bill Klein was so impressed during a visit to the Academy that in December of that year, the first four cadets started working in the ADM Division.

"During a visit to the Academy, I met several cadets and was immediately impressed by the caliber of the program and the youth," said Klein, who expanded ECBC's participation to include cadets in the Engineering Test Division based on the success of the first session.

The Academy's initial program consists of a 22-week residential phase during which cadets learn self-discipline, leadership and responsibility. Participants live and work in a controlled military environment, which encourages teamwork and personal growth. A 12-month post-residential

phase consists of helping to enroll students in continued education, technical school programs or entry-level employment.

The cadets' days are filled from morning to night with classroom work and physical education. They learn to depend on each other and to work together as a cohesive unit. Things like television are only available on occasion as an award for outstanding accomplishments and behavior.

As a means to provide the cadets with hands-on work experience, Schlein implemented a learning experience for the youth that would allow them to design a product showcasing their experience. They created the product using tools they learn to use in ADM, such as computer-aided design and rapid prototyping.

"During the second half of the semester, the cadets are placed in different working sites on post. Business workers or congressional workers take on cadets and have them work part-time in their offices, coming in two days a week for three weeks. This gives the youth the opportunity to learn first-hand from professionals and mentors," Schlein said.

Over the years, ECBC's ADM and Test divisions have become two of the most coveted placements offered through the Academy's Job Skills core component and assignments the cadets hope to get, according to Klein.

"We've built up a quality program here. The ADM and Test division workers really put some thought and preparation into how they can make the cadets' experience valuable, educational and enjoyable," he said. "We've really established a long-term relationship with the Academy and I see that relationship continuing well into the future."

For more information about ECBC, please visit <http://www.ecbc.army.mil/>.

ECBC is the Army's principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. ECBC has achieved major technological advances for the warfighter and for our national defense, with a long and distinguished history of providing the Armed Forces with quality systems and outstanding customer service. Located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., ECBC is a U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command laboratory. For more information about the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, please visit our web site at <http://www.ecbc.army.mil/> or call (410) 436-7718.