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By Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel

Alaska Guardsmen take part in drug awareness during Red Ribbon Week

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – Members of the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program joined multiple law enforcement agencies to promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle to students in Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough during Red Ribbon Week 2018, Oct. 23-31.

The United States Drug Enforcement Administration annual Red Ribbon Campaign is the nation's largest drug prevention effort that has touched the lives of millions of people around the world for over 30 years.

"The DEA's National Red Ribbon Week 2018 theme is 'Life is your journey, travel drug free'," said Sgt. 1st Class Joyce Dean, AKNG CDSP noncommissioned officer in charge. "The Alaska National Guard brings a baseline message of strong choices and our curriculum is rooted in evidence base best practices."

Students were greeted with excitement and high fives from the AKNG CDSP team, complete with a robotic police dog and a 10-foot tall inflatable "Guard against drugs" troop, affectionately known as Sgt. Drug Free, as they entered the school.

"We deliver a drug free message with excitement because we are invested in ensuring a healthy and drug free community," said Lt. Kimberly Conkling, AKNG CDSP coordinator. "We care about the youth of our Alaskan communities, about empowering them to make healthy choices, and about decreasing the negative impacts of drugs in our state."

The assembly paid homage to the origins of the campaign that took shape in response to the murder of DEA Agent Enrique (Kiki) Camarena. Angered parents and youth in communities across the country began annual celebrations and wearing Red Ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to raise awareness of the killing and destruction caused by drugs in America.

"Our message centers around what Red Ribbon Week is, what a drug is, and what it does to your brain and body," said Dean, who has been with the AKNG CDSP for almost two years. "We discuss healthy choices for physical and mental activities and show case prevention tools."

The prevention tools included inflating healthy and unhealthy pig lungs, a 5-foot fake cigarette with a list of up to 7,000 chemicals in cigarettes that can harm you, a jar of phlegm and tobacco teeth that all elicited looks of disgust on students' faces.

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“One of the things that we try to do with our prevention efforts is to delay the first use of any drug,” said Conkling. “By celebrating a drug free lifestyle with the youngest kids, we may be encouraging a drug free childhood, which often leads to a more healthy adulthood.”

“By being a part of DEA’s National Red Ribbon Week, we support one of our adjutant general’s line of efforts, which is “Engagement with Alaskan Communities,” said Dean.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157697135136470>

2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/299170/alaska-guardsmen-take-part-drug-awareness-during-red-ribbon-week>



Guardsmen with the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program participate in Red Ribbon Week in Wasilla with a drug-free celebration at Iditarod Elementary School, October 26, 2018. The event brought multiple law enforcement agencies together to promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle by greeting students upon arrival at school, static displays of military and police vehicles, and a drug free message. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)



Tech. Sgt. Eddie Perez, left, and 1st. Lt. Kimberly Conkling, both with the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program, demonstrate the capacity of a healthy lung during a drug-free celebration at Iditarod Elementary School in Wasilla, October 26, 2018. The event brought multiple law enforcement agencies together to promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle by greeting students upon arrival at school, static displays of military and police vehicles, and a drug-free message. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)

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Sgt. 1st Class Joyce Dean, left, and Chief Master Sgt. Bryan Morberg, both with the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program, show a High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle to students during a drug-free celebration at Iditarod Elementary School in Wasilla, October 26, 2018. The event brought multiple law enforcement agencies together to promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle by greeting students upon arrival at school, static displays of military and police vehicles, and a drug free message. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Guardsmen with the Alaska National Guard Counterdrug Support Program help kick-off Red Ribbon Week in Anchorage by greetings students as the arrive at school during a drug-free celebration at Muldoon Elementary School, October 29, 2018. The event brought multiple law enforcement agencies together to promote a healthy and drug-free lifestyle by greeting students upon arrival at school, static displays of military and police vehicles, and a drug-free message. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



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