

## VNDIA: Dahlgren has become a 'center of growth'



U.S. Navy photo by Andrew Revelos

Mark Safferstone (l.), executive director of the University of Mary Washington Dahlgren Campus, points out a feature of the new facility to members of the Virginia National Defense Industrial Authority during a tour of the campus.

By Andrew Revelos NSASP Staff Writer

Members of the Virginia National Defense Industrial Authority (VNDIA) visited Naval Support Facility (NSF) Dahlgren July 12 as part of their state-mandated mission "to promote the health, safety, welfare, convenience, and prosperity of the people of the Commonwealth in support of national defense."

The tour began with a stop at the University of Mary Washington (UMW) Dahlgren Campus, where VNDIA members were treated to an inside look at the 42,000 square foot facility's high-tech construction. The short list of the building features include geothermal wells, satellite video-enhanced classrooms and a green, vegetative roof intended to prevent environmentally damaging runoff.

Intended to address a lack of advanced education in the area surrounding Dahlgren, the campus is part of a 150-acre off-base development that will also include retail, hospitality and workforce housing areas.

VNDIA member and retired Rear Adm. Robert Fountain commented on just how much the Dahlgren area has changed over the years. "Thirty-five to 40 years ago, [Dahlgren] was fundamentally a gun range," he said. "The [UMW Dahlgren Campus] is a testimony to the highly technical work done here now. It shows you that Dahlgren has become a center of growth."

The facility will be more than just an educational space, according to Dr. Mark Safferstone, executive director for the UMW Dahlgren Campus, who guided the VNDIA delegation through the construction site. The campus will also coordinate with the Dahlgren Heritage Museum as a site for a permanent or rotating display, one of which will include how UMW students supported Dahlgren during World War 2.

"I share that as an example of how we're going to be part of the community," Safferstone told the VNDIA delegation.

From the UMW Dahlgren Campus, the group moved onto to the heart and soul of Dahlgren, the gun range. "The work we do here is absolutely critical to the Navy," said Capt. Michael Smith, commanding officer of Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD). "The facilities here are absolutely unique."

Smith briefed the delegation on the finer points of his organization's working capital fund structure, as well as an update on the project to replace Building 1200 and how the Gov. Harry Nice Bridge expansion will not affect range operations.

Smith stressed the importance of community relations in maintaining the Navy's premier overwater testing site. "We're good neighbors," Smith told VNDIA. "We tell people when we're going to be noisy."

Fountain remarked about the range's central role aboard Dahlgren. "It's always been the anchor point," he said. "There are facilities here that would be very hard to duplicate. [The range] represents the birthplace of Dahlgren and we can see its still in use."

Stops at Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense, NSWCDD's Directed Energy Warfare Center and the Joint Warfare Analysis Center (JWAC) completed the Dahlgren tour. VNDIA members expressed concern at JWAC's recent reduction in force as part of a DOD-mandated efficiency initiative.

"[JWAC] is where the rubber meets the road," Fountain told the rest of the group. While Col. Michael Orr, commanding officer of JWAC, was necessarily vague about the details of his organization's vital, operational mission during his briefing, VNDIA members left impressed with the level of knowledge and skills possessed by JWAC personnel.

VNDIA member Kurt Tripp wondered how many resources went into creating and sustaining the expertise of highly-trained personnel like those at JWAC. He hoped those individuals would be able to keep that expertise in Virginia as they pursued other professional opportunities.

Fountain too, though dismayed by JWAC's reduction in force, said he would continue to stress Dahlgren's importance at the state level.

"We need to recognize that NSF Dahlgren is a major employer in the state of Virginia," said Fountain. "We need to maintain an interface with the military, the local community and the state."

But VNDIA's tour of Dahlgren did more than just show members around a base; it demonstrated the installation's sense of community that doesn't stop at the wire.

"It's a great town," said Tripp of Dahlgren. "[The tour] will help us keep in line the goals of the governor and the legislature and that's our purpose."