Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum hosts tour for emerging community leaders

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (May 23, 2023) -- Fort Drum officials welcomed Jefferson Leadership Institute (JLI) students for an installation-wide tour May 19, as part of their professional development within the Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce program.

JLI participants hail from diverse sectors of industry, to include health care, family services, media, civil service, and education.

The Fort Drum tour provided them with a glimpse into how a military installation functions, both internally – like a city within a city – and as a community partner in the tri-county region.

Bridging the gap between history and current events, the group first visited the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum and then met with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade Soldiers and civilian personnel at Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield.

Maj. Daniel Liebetreu, operations officer with 1st Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment, 10th CAB, spoke about a team-building trait that applies equally to military and corporate organizations.

“Trust is important to us, and I’m sure it is to all of you,” he said. “It’s hard to build trust and it takes time, but you can lose it in an instant. So, trust is something we work on and develop through repetition of flight time. And we essentially are a support element for the guys on the ground, so quite often we are flying with 10th Mountain Division Soldiers, and we have to be able to develop trust with them as well.”

Other site visits included the Fort Drum STARBASE Academy, which offers local fifth-grade students a weeklong STEM program, and the Bridgewater-Vaccaro Medical Simulation Training Center, which provides state-of-the-art medical skills sustainment to service members and area first responders. This gave the JLI group a better understanding how Fort Drum supports units across the Department of Defense with training capabilities, while also being good community partners by offering programs for local organizations.

“Fort Drum is undoubtedly a critical part of our community,” said Kayla Jamieson, Greater Watertown-North Country Chamber of Commerce president and CEO. “Students were able to learn about the Fort Drum mission from the unique perspectives of Soldiers and garrison leadership for a deeper understanding of its impact on our region. The class is made up of community leaders who then use this newfound knowledge to help drive positive change for the mission in and around Jefferson County.”

According to the JLI website, the program was developed in 1991 after community leaders recognized that the future of the Jefferson County area is linked to the quality of its leadership. JLI teaches and cultivates new community leaders by immersing participants in community issues through 12 full-day sessions that run from September through June.

“We had a history day where we visited the Jefferson County Historical Society, a medical day where we went to Samaritan Medical Center, and then we went to City Hall to get the political side,” said Sabrina Starr, administrative and events assistant with The Arc of Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties. “I think it’s collectively where this program excels because we get to see the bigger picture about how it all works together.”

Starr said she did not realize the size and scope of Fort Drum until now, and she gained an appreciation for how it connects with the tri-county region.

“I’ve only stepped foot on the base once before, so I thought this was really interesting,” she said. “I had no idea that kids went to STARBASE Academy or that LeRay Mansion was even here. I learned a lot about what’s happening on base I never would have known.”

Cathy Fahsel, a strategic planner with the Fort Drum Plans, Analysis, and Integration Office, said her supervisor (and JLI graduate) recommended the leadership development program to her.

“As I looked into the program and what it offered, I found it afforded the opportunity to be more involved in the North Country community and gain awareness of the present and futures issues affecting the community,” she said.

Fahsel said that the site visits made her more aware of the community’s needs, challenges, and resources.

“I’m from this area but what amazes me is that, in every session, I learned something I didn’t know about, right here in my hometown,” she said. “You think you know where you’re from, and then you find out there’s so much more to it.”

Fahsel is also a graduate of the Fort Drum LEADER (Leader Enhancement and Developmental Education Requirements) program, offered to civilian employees to develop team-building, problem-solving, goal-setting and time management skills. The Workforce Development program is a 24-month commitment where participants engage in team projects, public speaking activities, site visits, and job shadows.

“I think both (JLI and LEADER) programs provide opportunities to strengthen personal leadership competencies, experience new things, and form alliances,” Fahsel said.

The Fort Drum tour was the final site visit before the class graduates.

“I thought the tour of Fort Drum was amazing,” Fahsel said. “For most of my classmates, it was the first time they had ever visited Fort Drum, and they all commented on how much they learned, and that ‘Fort Drum Day’ was one of their favorite experiences.”

“JLI was an amazing experience overall,” she continued. “The opportunities it provides to experience the surrounding communities and businesses is extraordinary. And the camaraderie and friendships I formed with classmates is priceless.”

For further information regarding this release, contact Fort Drum Public Affairs at 315-772-9043 or email [katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil](mailto:katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil)

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Photo Captions:

JLI1 - Joanne Witt, Fort Drum STARBASE Academy director, introduces members of the Jefferson Leadership Institute class to the staff and highlights the STEM education curriculum they offer to area students. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

JLI2 - Maj. Daniel Liebetreu, operations officer with 1st Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, spoke about team-building with members of the Jefferson Leadership Institute class during their visit to Fort Drum on May 19. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

JLI3 - Members of the Jefferson Leadership Institute class tour the 1st Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment hangar and speak with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade Soldiers during their visit to Fort Drum on May 19. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)