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Coast Guard dedicates new barracks, galley

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By William F. West

Top Coast Guard brass, base personnel and local officials were on hand Tuesday to dedicate Coast Guard Base Elizabeth City's new barracks and galley complex.

Mindful of a need to remain linked to the past, the new barracks continues to bear the name of its predecessor, Thrun Hall. The name honors the late Charles Theodore Thrun, one of the Coast Guard's first aviators and the first Coast Guardsman to attain the status of an aviator from the enlisted ranks. Thrun was the first Coast Guard aviator killed in the line of duty. He died in 1935, when his Grumman JF-2 Duck crashed off Cape May, N.J.

Coast Guard Vice Adm. John Currier said Thrun was probably looking down and smiling because of the legacy he left and the way his legacy was being honored.

"We will continue to build on your foundation," Currier said.

The new barracks, which is three stories high, has 155 rooms, with two Coast Guard members housed per room. The barracks houses not only those attending the Aviation Technical Training Center, but Coast Guard members on call at the base and on call at Small Boat Station Elizabeth City.

The new galley has the capacity to seat 112 inside and, when the weather is warm, 36 more outside.

The barracks and galley complex were constructed at a cost of nearly \$17 million to replace the former Thrun Hall, which dated back to 1968.

The new Thrun Hall, which has been open since January, is across from the ATTC and its Rescue Swimmer Training Facility.

Currier, has served approximately 37 years as a Coast Guardsman and has been to Elizabeth City many times. On Tuesday morning, the vice commandant used the speaker's podium to praise those currently serving in Elizabeth City.

He said he believes that the Coast Guard has never been held higher in the estimation of the American taxpayer than today. He said he believes that this is due in no small part to the efforts of those on the front lines and in support of operations at Elizabeth City.

"Fixers and flyers. That's the way it has been. That's the way it needs to be," he said.

“We are a unique service in that the people who work on our aircraft fly our aircraft. And that, believe me, is a distinct strength for us,” he said.

Currier echoed remarks made moments earlier by Rear Adm. Ronald Rabago, who said that the Coast Guard is committed to being good stewards of dollars and facilities.

Rabago is the Coast Guard’s assistant commandant for engineering and logistics.

Rabago said that the former Thrun Hall is going to be demolished sometime later this year and that the Coast Guard intends to recycle a large portion of materials from the 45-year-old structure.

He said the new barracks and galley complex meet high standards for energy conservation, including plumbing designed to reduce water consumption by 30 percent. “We have delivered an innovative, functional, cost-effective and sustainable facility to support our workforce and training programs here at Elizabeth City,” he said.

He invited people to take a look inside. “You’ll see a well-designed and very functional building,” he said.

Local residents and officials afterward were impressed with the new barracks.

Each room has a refrigerator, a microwave oven and a flat screen television, along with desks, lockers, a lavatory and a shower.

The first floor entrance to the new barracks serves as the quarterdeck, where one will find watchstanders, along with the officer of the day. The second and third floors have recreation rooms. As for the rest of the barracks, each floor has a kitchen and a laundry room.

James Stanley, a former firefighter at Base Elizabeth City, said he believes the new barracks and galley complex is great. “It sure does beat the one that they built 45 years ago,” he said.

Stanley said the former Thrun Hall “was good for its time” and added that he believes Coast Guard officials “will say that in 45 years” when they probably build another facility.

Elizabeth City Regional Airport Manager Scott Hinton, himself a former Coast Guardsman, flew C-130 aircraft out of the Air Station from 1998 to 2002. Hinton did not live in the former barracks, but he ate in the former galley while on duty.

Hinton said he likes the new barracks in part because he believes a lot of thought went into using it “not just as a place to house students, but to facilitate their learning” to support the Coast Guard’s mission. He cited the presence of reading rooms as an example.

Hinton added that even the layout of the recreation rooms allow students to get together and collaborate throughout their training. “It’s purpose-built, which is important,” he said. “It wasn’t just stamped out as a hotel.”

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