



PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska Air Guardsmen upgrade Latvian children's center, change lives

RIGA, Latvia — Thirty-four Alaska Air Guardsmen from the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron and support units spent two weeks renovating a center for children with disabilities in Riga, Latvia, as part of a Humanitarian Civic Assistance (HCA) mission during their annual training, July 24 to Aug. 6.

The team installed new windows and sills, radiators, electrical outlets, light fixtures, plumbing, and performed other necessary upgrades. Many improvements were needed for safety and energy efficiency in the 53-year-old "Mēs esam līdzās" Rehabilitation Center.

Along with providing civic assistance, the Alaska Airmen accomplished two weeks of required annual training. They had the opportunity to gain more experience in their assigned trades and branch out to learn more about other trades as well.

"I'm proud to be the commander of this unit," said Lt. Col. Kass Larson, commander of the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron. "We got the training done and we exceeded our goals for the mission."

In addition to the unique experience of working alongside Latvian military personnel and contractors, the civil engineer team from Alaska gained more familiarity about how to engage relationally in a foreign country, where there are cultural and language differences. These types of experiences can help prepare service members for encounters with local populations during deployments.

One of the benefits to training in Latvia was showcasing what the United States can do.

"The team was amazing," said Col. Marvin Ee, the commander of the 176th Mission Support Group, after observing their work personally. "They represented themselves very well as ambassadors of our country."

HCA projects are coordinated and supported by multiple organizations including the National Guard Bureau and U.S. Embassy. It takes a few years of research, planning and resourcing to execute a project.

The Alaska Airman were the third of four Air National Guard rotations on the project, including the 285th Civil Engineer Squadron (Virgin Islands), the 168th Civil Engineer Squadron (Alaska), the 141st Civil Engineer Squadron (Washington state) and the 202nd RED HORSE (Florida).

"I think the 176th CES is a great group," said Capt. R. Arthur Burton, the project manager. "They worked additional hours to meet team goals and to complete the project on time, with quality workmanship."

HCA's allow Guard members to participate in humanitarian missions during annual training, honing technical skills while helping the local community.

Historically in Latvia, children with disabilities were once sent to institutions, according to Dr. Andra Greitane, the director of the center. One of the goals of the rehabilitation center is to provide the children with assistance and put them back with their families.

"We are very, very thankful to the U.S. government for this project," Greitane said.

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1. **Attached pdf** includes story and selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.

2. **Flickr link** includes complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images.

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm5fu1xg>

(Flickr may not be accessible from .mil computers. Flickr app available on smart devices.)

RIGA, Latvia — Thirty-four Alaska Air Guardsmen from the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron and support units repair a children's rehabilitation center here during their two-week annual training as part of a humanitarian civic assistance project, July 24 to Aug. 6. The Alaska Airman were the third rotation of Air National Guardsmen on the project working alongside Latvian military and contractors to upgrade the aging Rehabilitation Center, "Mēs esam līdzās." (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Tech. Sgt. N. Alicia Halla/ Released)

