



For Immediate Release
By: Sgt. Karima Turner

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Alaska Military Youth Academy Graduates More Than 2,800 in 15 Years

One hundred thirty-six cadets to graduate from AMYA ChalleNGe program Friday

CAMP DENALI, Alaska – The Alaska Military Youth Academy graduated 136 cadets today at the Buckner Physical Fitness Center on Fort Richardson.

The 136 graduates are part of the more than 2,800 cadets that have graduated the *ChalleNGe* program since it started 15 years ago in 1994.

“I am proud of all these men and women, for their work ethic and positive determination,” said Gov. Sean Parnell. “They chose discipline, they chose life and they are preparing for the biggest adventure of their lives – their future. I’ve said before that the youth are our future, but this group of young men and women are our present and our future.”

The AMYA *ChalleNGe* program helps young Alaskans achieve high school completion and develop the life skills necessary to become successful, productive community members.

“The Alaska Military Youth Academy never ceases to amaze me,” said Dr. James Jones, deputy director of the Alaska Military Youth Academy. “We have nine who have earned their high school diploma, 83 receiving their GED, 23 returning to high school or enrolling in correspondence courses, of those, we already have five cadets attending the University of Alaska and more than 100 of these students have received career readiness certificates.”

The cadets have completed five and a half months of academics, military-style discipline and training and community service as part of the AMYA *ChalleNGe* program.

“Overall I’m very proud that I came here,” said cadet Nichole Barnes, honor graduate and corps first sergeant, AMYA. “Before I came here, I wasn’t on the right track at all. I’ve gained so much confidence since being here; before, I couldn’t stand in a room with a few people and speak, but now, not only can I stand in front of my platoon, but in front of the entire academy and speak.”

Through discipline, and hard work, the cadets strove to take charge of their lives and become more like their team leaders and role models, the kind of people who make a difference.

“Above other classes, these young men and women really stood out in the area of community service,” Jones said. “In a time of economic hardship in our country, these cadets learned early on about giving-back and self-sacrifice. We saw this group actively looking for ways to help their community, they rose to the occasion, and I’ve had the privilege of seeing them grow, develop, and transform into exceptional young adults; I expect to see that continue.”

Although many of the cadets still have a long road ahead of them, by graduating from AMYA, they have made a positive change that will affect the rest of their lives.

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Cutlines:

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Alaska Military Youth Academy 2nd Platoon team leader, Rick Gamble, assists cadet Dustyn Dimascio, of Anchorage, with the placing of his shoulder rope prior to the AMYA graduation, which was held Aug. 28 at Buckner Physical Fitness Center on Fort Richardson. Dimascio, along with 135 other graduates are part of the more than 2,800 cadets that have graduated the *ChalleNGe* program since it started 15 years ago in 1994. Photo: Sgt. Karima Turner, DMVA Public Affairs

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Alaska Military Youth Academy 4th Platoon team leader, Jolene Allyn, gets a thank you hug from cadet Melissa Charles of Hydaburg prior to the AMYA graduation ceremony, which was held Aug. 28 at Buckner Physical Fitness Center on Fort Richardson. Charles, along with 135 other graduates are part of the more than 2,800 cadets that have graduated the *ChalleNGe* program since it started 15 years ago in 1994. Photo: Sgt. Karima Turner, DMVA Public Affairs

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Alaska Military Youth Academy cadet Nichole Barnes, honor graduate for the cycle and corps first sergeant, shakes hands with Gov. Sean Parnell after graduating from the AMYA Aug. 28 at Buckner Physical Fitness Center. Barnes, of Palmer, along with 135 other graduates are part of the more than 2,800 cadets that have graduated the *ChalleNGe* program since it started 15 years ago in 1994. Photo: Sgt. Karima Turner, DMVA Public Affairs

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Alaska Military Youth Academy Commandant Vicky Gardner dismisses class 2009-02 upon graduating Aug. 28 at Buckner Physical Fitness Center. Since the *ChalleNGe* program opened its doors 15 years ago in 1994 it has successfully graduated more than 2,800 cadets. Photo: Sgt. Karima Turner, DMVA Public Affairs

For more photos go to:

<http://www.dmva.alaska.gov/content/galleries/AMYA%20Graduation%202009/default.htm>