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News Release #54-15

May 7, 2015

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## **NDSTC opens doors to public for Year of the Military Diver**

PANAMA CITY BEACH, Fla. – The Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center (NDSTC) opened its doors for the first time for public visitation at their facilities May 6, as part of the commemoration of the Year of the Military Diver (YOTMD).

The open house welcomed the general public, including students from area schools and featured demonstrations of technical diving, deep-sea diving, and decompression chambers.

The day's events included a brief ceremony during which U.S. Representative Gwen Graham (D-Fla.) highlighted her support to the Year of the Military Diver.

"It is known worldwide that Panama City is the home of military diving," said Graham. "That is why it was my passion and commitment to get Congress to declare this the Year of the Military Diver."

Also at the ceremony, retired Capt. Heidemarie Stefanyshyn-Piper presented Cmdr. Hung Cao, commanding officer of NDSTC, a U.S. Navy diver T-shirt that was flown aboard the U.S. Space Shuttle Atlantis during her mission to the International Space Station in 2006.

Visitors to the NDSTC open-house were able to tour the facilities and interact with students and staff members from every branch of the military. The highlight of the festivities for many of the visitors and staff was a diver diving with the Mark V dive suit. The Copper Collar' diving helmet is the trademark for deep sea diving and the YOTMD marks the 100th year the Mark V has been in service.

"It's an amazing feeling to dive with Mark V suit," said Navy Diver 2nd Class Valerie De Freitas. "This suit is a part of diving history and to share this not only with my fellow members of the diving community, but also with the public who are interested in what we do; it's awesome."

The Mark V was demonstrated in the NDSTC deep-water training pool which is the second largest pool by volume in the world, measuring 40 feet deep and holding one-million gallons of water. Spectators were able to visit the pool deck and view the Mark V dive through windows at the bottom of the pool.

"It's nice to come and see everything they do here, I've never had the opportunity to tour this facility before," said Kyle Brown, a visitor to NDSTC. "I think most people drive past here and they don't know exactly what is done here or the hard work that's done, and so this gives an opportunity for everyone in the public to see what they do everyday."

More than 1,500 visitors attended the NDSTC YOTMD open house celebration. According to both staff and visitors, there was something for everyone at NDSTC's public visitation day; it was a chance to learn and appreciate military diving, but to also have fun doing it.

"I have never lived somewhere as supportive and welcoming to the military as Panama City," said Cao. "This is the home of military diving. All the research

and development and training takes place here. This is our way to give back to our community.”

Additional YOTMD events in the month of May include the Copper Collar 5K run at St. Andrews State Park on May 16. For more information on this and other YOTMD events, visit the NDSTC visit the NDSTC web page:

<http://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/ceneoddive/ndstc/>

Commissioned in 1980, NDSTC is the largest diving facility in the world and trains more than 1,200 divers from all services in the Department of Defense, allied partners, and other government agencies. This year, NDSTC will recognize 35 years of training in conjunction with the Year of the Military Diver and this year and the 100th anniversary of the Mark V Dive helmet.

More information on the Naval Education and Training Command can be found on the NETC website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

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Story by Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center Public Affairs