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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Business owner helps build S.D. foreign relations

By Capt. Anthony Deiss

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Around the world, the U.S. is facing an ever changing geo-political landscape with diplomatic uncertainties. To help foster positive foreign relations with democratic nations, the U.S. relies on its states and territories to establish broad reaching and friendly ties.

Known as the State Partnership Program (SPP), the program links U.S. states and partner nations in support of mutual interests at all levels of society utilizing the National Guard as the catalyzing force and means of support.

With the help of Rapid City business owner Dan Ames, the South Dakota National Guard's SPP was able to get a jump start in developing new contacts and relationships with the South American country of Suriname, just weeks after the programs formalization in August of 2006.

"I've been doing business in Suriname since 2000 and was looking to take a trip to the country," said Dan Ames, American Concrete Equipment company co-owner and business manager. "I met Lt. Col. Tracy Settle, South Dakota-Suriname State Partnership Program director, and he shared information with me on the program."

The SPP has many different focus areas ranging from tourism and agriculture to education and foreign investment, all of which are based upon similarities and interest between South Dakotans and Surinamers. Lt. Col. Settle's introduction to Ames through a Rapid City Chamber of Commerce meeting in August of 2006 helped set the stage for the formulation of the program's first business participants.

"Relationship development is the key to unlocking the power of the State Partnership Program," said Lt. Col. Settle. "Making the connections between interested state and partner contacts is critical for developing a network of key participants for the program."

Through the SPP, institutional and people-to-people relationships are developed with a long-term outlook. The state facilitates local government, academic and economic contacts as well as National Guard and civilian community involvement in personal contacts with the partner country.

Ames introduced Settle to Surinamese friend and concrete business owner Farik Ghafoerkhan, who agreed to meet with Settle during his first trip to Suriname. What transpired led to a mutual benefiting relationship for the concrete block maker and for Lt. Col. Settle.

“Farik provided me with a tour of his facility, a tour of the town and a dinner meeting to discuss other business contacts in Suriname who could benefit from the State Partnership Program,” said Settle. “And in return, Farik received an invitation from the U.S. Ambassador to get involved in the program and to meet other high-level American officials and Surinamers alike.”

“Farik has been able to get to know other people in his home town as a result of Tracy,” said Ames. “And together we have broadened Farik’s perception of world trade and American business processes.”

The program facilitates linking the right personnel, with the right skills and qualifications, at the right time, to accomplish mutually agreed upon objectives. Some of the major objectives of the SPP are to assist with the development of democratic institutions, foster open market economies to help develop stability, project and represent U.S. humanitarian values, improve military interoperability between U.S. and partner nation forces and to demonstrate military subordination and support to civilian authorities.

“Cultivating relationships requires numerous and repeated contacts with key leaders on both ends,” added Settle. “Meetings, receptions, social events, emails and updates all contribute to the continued success of State Partnership Program activities.”

At American Concrete Equipment, the company rebuilds and resells concrete block making equipment. From Latin and South America to Bosnia, the Ukraine and China, the company sells their production making equipment to a variety of businesses all over the world. According to Ames, the world business market is not only vital to American interests, but to the benefit of developing nations.

“The State Partnership Program is necessary because Suriname is developing and it has a lot to offer,” said Ames. “It needs to understand how a democracy and a capitalistic society like the United States does business, and the benefits for doing business with South Dakota, the U.S. and the world.”

Settle explained that the relationships that are forged from these types of introductions and engagements, and through community organizations like the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce, help to set the conditions for a successful program.

“This first in-country contact validated the State Partnership Program from inception,” said Lt. Col. Settle. “My personal involvement with community activities and business organizations like the chamber provided the exposure to generate contacts for the program. It cannot be done from seven-to-four at the armory.”

As businessmen, Ames and Ghafoerkhan use concrete making equipment to allow others to build structures. As SPP participants they use their relationships to help others strengthen foreign relations between the people of South Dakota and Suriname.

“I really enjoyed working with Tracy and having him introduce me to the people he has invited to South Dakota from Suriname,” said Ames. “It’s been fun talking first hand a little bit about Suriname and getting to know them and helping Tracy explore opportunities for both.”

“They are wonderful people to do business with,” concluded Ames. “I think it’s an undiscovered resource for business and travel and it’s really going to help having the SPP ‘building bridges’ in Suriname.”

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Maj. Orson Ward at (605) 737-6721, cell (605) 431-8753 or Lt. Col. Tracy Settle at (605) 737-6771.

Photo caption: South Dakota-Suriname State Partnership Program participant and business owner Farik Ghafoerkhan displays a concrete block made by his concrete block making company Eucon located in the capitol city of Paramaribo, Suriname. (Army photo by Lt. Col. Tracy Settle) (Released)

Link to Photo: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil/released/Ghafoerkhan.JPG>