

Guard team supports state's information access efforts

By John Vannucci
March 7, 2021

With more than 78,000 Spanish-speakers throughout the state, Rhode Island health officials were challenged with quickly conveying important information about COVID guidelines and restrictions in a way that would include all Rhode Islanders. That's where the Rhode Island National Guard (RING) stepped in. The RING team produced a series of videos and radio public services announcements (PSAs) in both English and Spanish. Rhode Island's Spanish-language radio aired the RINGs' PSAs at a time when educating the public was critical to helping stop the spread of COVID.

Sergeant Roger T. Montanez first had to create a Spanish language video PSA and appeared on camera with 143d Airlift Wing recruiter Staff Sgt. Kiara Pimentel. Coaching the performers on Spanish was 143d Airlift Wing recruiter Senior Airman Kenny Diaz-Figueroa. Pimentel and Diaz-Figueroa also helped author and perform audio PSAs in Spanish and English.

"Having the opportunity to record a Spanish PSA was exciting because we were able to help our community. It was also a challenge. Coming from a Dominican family and working with a team of peers with different Hispanic heritage, we had to work together to find a language that all Spanish speakers would understand. Overall, I felt honored to be able to be a part of a bigger mission and see it come together," said Staff Sergeant Kiara Pimentel.



Army Sergeant Roger T. Montanez and Air Force Staff Sgt. Kiara Pimentel from the Rhode Island National Guard teamed up to record a video Spanish Language PSA to inform and alleviate fears in the Hispanic community of Rhode Island regarding COVID-19 healthcare information and test sites.



Rhode Island National Guardsmen Senior Airman Kenneth Diaz-Figueroa and Staff Sergeant John Vannucci work on Spanish translation of the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health, Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott's "Wellness in a COVID-19 Environment" video.

Diaz-Figueroa also prepared Spanish transcripts of PSAs produced jointly by the RING and RI Department of Health when they were still in the process of identifying a Spanish-language transcriptionist, even receiving some assistance from his mother in Puerto Rico via phone for the more complicated translations.

"We are so thankful to our Guard members for stepping up. The importance of providing access is that we do a lot of the work for the community. However, if the community can't understand it, then it's as if we didn't do the work," said Angélica Infante-Green, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education.

The efforts to voice and transcribe Spanish content to keep all Rhode Islanders informed were entirely outside the scope of these Guardsmen's jobs. However, the team felt it was worth keeping all residents informed of emerging health information.

"One of the most rewarding things we can do as members of the Guard is help people. To be part of a team that provided access to information that may have saved someone's life is satisfying. It's the kind of mission we can all get behind. This is why we sign up for the Guard," said Senior Airman Kenneth Diaz-Figueroa.