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Coed Citadel Still a Work in Progress

By BRUCE SMITH

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CHARLESTON, S.C. — Ten years ago, The Citadel threw open its doors to women after a protracted, heated legal fight. On Saturday, a new class of 650 freshmen — including about 40 women — arrive. But the challenge of bringing women into the once all-male cadet corps isn't over. Some male cadets and alumni still don't like the idea.

"There will always be pockets of people who don't want a coed school," said Nancy Mace Jackson, the college's first female cadet graduate.

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Tara Woodside, left, from Salem, N.J., Ryan Kilgo, of Darlington, S.C. and Amanda Rawl, right, of Honea Path, S.C. stand together at the Padgett-Thomas Barracks Thursday, Aug. 10, 2006, in Charleston, S.C. These upperclassmen, men and women alike, on Saturday greet 650 freshmen — about 40 women — to begin instructing them in their new lives as knobs at the state's military college. (AP Photo/Mary Ann Chastain)

Tara Woodside, a junior from Salem, N.J., was in grade school when Jackson arrived on campus.

"There are some guys who are skeptical at first," Woodside said. "But once a woman proves herself, they are your biggest supporters."

One of the biggest difficulties is attracting more women, who now make up 6 percent of the cadet corps. During the past decade, 129 female cadets have graduated, and this year there will be nearly 130 women among the college's almost 2,000 cadets.

"You need 15 to 16 percent of a group for a minority to get inclusion," said Retired Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey Weart. "So we have a long way to go."

Weart was in the first graduating class with women at West Point in 1980 and is now director of The Citadel's Krause Initiative in Ethics and Leadership. He assumed the post after retiring from the military academy, where he handled assimilation issues.

"The assimilation of women is one variable we will have to continue to work on for the next 20 years," he said.

This fall, school president Lt. Gen. John Rosa is starting a Values and Respect Program to provide cadets ongoing education in areas including sexual harassment, alcohol abuse, the honor code, racism and discrimination.

Rosa previously served as superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy, arriving there amid a leadership shake-up after dozens of female cadets reported they had been sexually assaulted.

Citadel officials say the new program is more expansive than any training aimed at preventing sexual harassment the cadets have previously had.

"We're trying instead of having a stovepipe program for one issue to have a comprehensive program," said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Harry Carter, interim provost and dean of the college.

It was not easy for women to pry open The Citadel's gates.

Shannon Faulkner sued for admission in 1993 and was admitted as a cadet under a court order two years later. She withdrew after five days, citing isolation and stress.

In 1996, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled a similar all-male cadet policy at Virginia Military Institute was unconstitutional and The Citadel opened its doors.

Four were admitted, but before the end of the fall semester, two of them said they had been hazed, including having their clothes set on fire by male cadets.

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Jackson recalled in her 2001 book "In the Company of Men" how those first years weren't easy.

She told of some alumni's animosity, including one who singled her out at football games, wiped his muddy soles on her spit-shined leather shoes and whispered obscenities. He told Jackson she was "ruining his school."

"I think in some ways these next 10 years will be harder if not just as hard," said Jackson, who works for a marketing firm in Atlanta.

But, she said, the college has come very far, very fast.

"To go coed in such a short time, I think they were successful," Jackson said. "There were obviously bumps in the road."

Val Vojdik, one of the attorneys who fought to open the cadet corps to women, said assimilation goes beyond The Citadel and will take more than a decade.

"It's definitely not enough time. It's not enough time in the military or the service academies," said Vojdik, now an associate professor at the College of Law at West Virginia University. Full acceptance of women, she said, will require "a cultural change in the military itself."

Jackson has become president of the Atlanta chapter of the college's alumni organization.

"I never thought in 100 years that would happen," she said.

She is expecting her first child on Christmas Eve and says she has no doubt where the child will attend school.

"I told my husband this is the only college I will pay for," she said with a laugh, adding she doesn't know if it is a boy or a girl. But, since The Citadel now admits women, "it won't matter either way."

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