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New deployment center opens in TAC

Article and Photos
By Steve Wright
Transatlantic Programs Center

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has deployed 2,000 of its Soldiers and Civilian members to Iraq and Afghanistan. Until recently, the gateway for Corps Civilians deploying to these combat theaters was through Continental U.S. Replacement Centers (CRCs) at Fort Benning, Ga., Fort Sill, Okla., and Fort Bliss, Texas.

Early this year, the Corps directed its Transatlantic Programs Center (TAC) to establish a Deployment Center to certify Corps Civilians for deployment to and redeployment from Afghanistan and Iraq.

This mission was accomplished when on May 8 all Corps Civilians deploying to Iraq started coming through the USACE Deployment Center at TAC in Winchester, Va.

Before May 8, TAC deployed Corps Civilians to Afghanistan and had done so for the past two years, while Corps Civilians, military members, and contractors deployed to Iraq through the Fort Bliss CRC.

When TAC opened the Deployment Center in May, all Civilians deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan now go through the new center. Corps military members continue to deploy through the Fort Bliss CRC, which provides additional military and security training not required by Civilians. Contractors deploying to Iraq also continue to deploy through Fort Bliss.

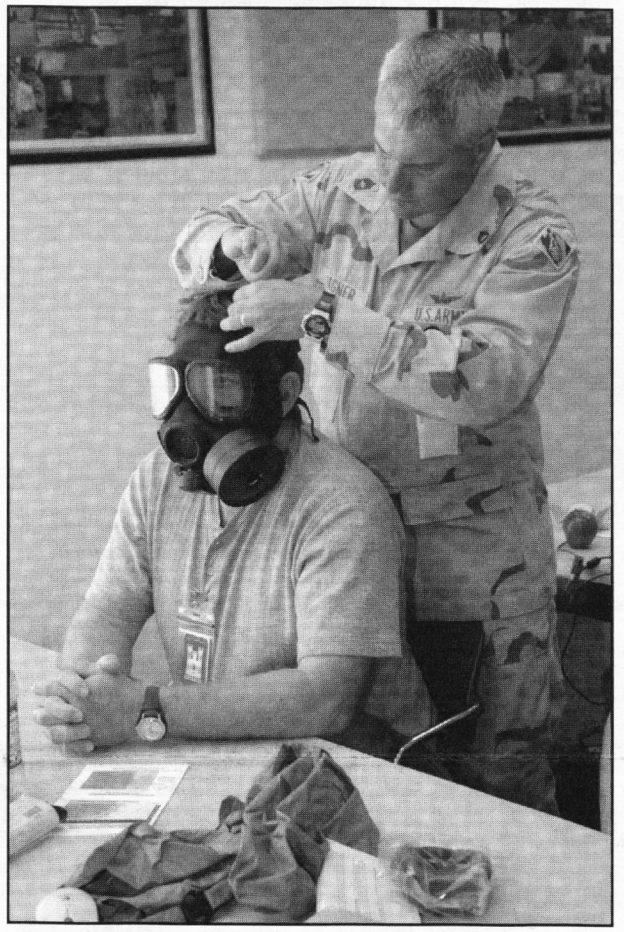
By establishing the Deployment Center, the Corps accomplished several important goals, said Scott Lowdermilk, TAC's Plans and Operations chief. Lowdermilk's office is responsible for the center.

"People in the Corps have talked about opening a Deployment Center since our involvement with Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1991, but we've never had the funding," Lowdermilk said. "However, when Afghanistan and Iraq came along and we had people deploying in larger numbers, it began to make economic sense. We're able to send people though the Deployment Center several days quicker than they can go through the CRC at Fort Bliss. We estimated a savings of $1,800 per person if we trained our people at our own USACE Deployment Center. When we were able to show that a Deployment Center would save money, everything became possible."

Taking care of people is equally important to the USACE Deployment Center. For Civilians, deploying to a combat zone is unsettling, Lowdermilk said. He also pointed out that deploying through a military installation made the transition for Civilians even more challenging. They learned first hand at Fort Bliss about 'Hurry up and wait,' as well as experiencing other unique elements of military life.

"Some of our Corps folks have never been on an installation," said Lowdermilk. "You get up at 0500 for the first roll call and find out what you're doing for the rest of the day. You also find out that there is a three-hour gap between roll call and when you first do something. Civilians also experienced sleeping in open-bay barracks with several hundred people making more than a little noise."

The Deployment Center curriculum is organized to cover the same essential requirements covered at CRC. These include medical screening, shots, and training in first aid, cultural awareness, and force protection. Deployees are issued military clothing and gear and trained in the proper use of equipment



Master Sgt. Ron Wagner adjusts the fit of a protective mask for Darion Taylor during the Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical briefing, a standard part of pre-deployment training. Tyler, from Kansas City District, is deploying to Afghanistan. Wagner is a member of the Deployment Center staff.

John Ashley (left) and Jim Parks apply a leg tourniquet during the first aid portion of the Deployment Center training. Ashley, from Mississippi Valley Division, and Parks from North Atlantic Division are both deploying to Iraq.

Sandy Ginn, registered nurse, gives Frank Spears one of several shots administered at the Deployment Center. Spears was hired from the private sector to go to Iraq.

such as gas masks, protective vests, and helmets.

The training schedule includes briefings on filling out time sheets and travel vouchers. As a result, the numbers of pay and voucher-related issues have dropped, according to Judy Lynskey, who oversees the Administrative Processing Personnel Office at TAC. Her office processes pre-deployment paperwork, issues travel orders, and keeps time and attendance for 600 people in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The timesheets for our people serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are very complicated," Lynskey said. "They have regular pay, scheduled overtime, unscheduled overtime, holiday pay, holiday premium pay, and night-differential pay, as well as danger pay, post differential pay and travel pay. Needless to say, the class we teach on pay results in many questions."

"Our number one problem used to be pay issues," said Lowdermilk. "I worked 200 pay issues at the Gulf Region Division (GRD) when I was in Iraq. I thought that most of these issues could be lessened if we offered a class to explain pay to the people being deployed. Once we had the chance to work with them, the number of pay issues dropped significantly."

Another valuable benefit is controlling the schedule and processing of predeployment paperwork for civilian team members, said Keith Frye, the officer in charge of the Deployment Center.

"We're in control of processing the pre-deployment paperwork and establish the Deployment Center schedule," said Frye. "Therefore we can set our own priorities and can accommodate people at situations if needed. We are in control of the entire process and this gives us great flexibility."

Selecting TAC to stand up a deployment center is a natural fit due to TAC's responsibility for Corps missions in the Middle East. Although TAC has had five different names since it was established in 1952, its mission of engineering and construction support in the Middle East remains the same. In addition, TAC has been designated as the Corps' organization to provide reach-back assistance to GRD and its districts, as well as Afghanistan Engineer District.

"Having team members process through TAC provides an opportunity for many of the deployees to meet TAC people who will provide them with technical or reach-back support services," Lowdermilk said. "That helps to build relationships for the successful completion of our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan."

For Lynskey and the 10 members of her team, meeting the people who volunteered is special. "One of the highlights is that we get to see the people we work with and know them on a first-name basis," she said. "Now that we have a Deployment Center, we have the chance to meet everyone who we issue orders to and make sure that they are paid. It's truly rewarding to talk to someone over the telephone, get their information and qualifications, and then have that person walk though our door to say hello."

Insights

Committment means giving your whole self

By Col. Mark Fentress
Chaplain, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

A chicken and a pig were walking down the road one day discussing world issues. When they passed a restaurant advertising "Ham and Eggs," the chicken suggested that they step inside and provide some worthy customer with a good breakfast.

"No thanks," said the pig. "For you it would be just a donation. For me, it would mean a total commitment."

Moving to a more serious topic, I recently heard the story of a young nine-year-old boy whose baby sister was in desperate need of a blood transfusion. Without it she would surely die from her battle with leukemia.

Knowing that both of the children's blood types were the same, the parents asked their son if he would be willing to donate a pint of blood for his sister. Initially, he avoided answering their question. Later that evening, he asked his parents to give him a night to think about it and then he would let them know. The next morning the boy gave his permission to his parents.

Well, to make a long and inspiring story short, the young boy was soon lying on a hospital bed next to his sister giving her a life-saving transfusion of his blood. A few minutes later the doctor came by to check on the boy. He asked, "Bobby, how are you doing?" Immediately the kid opened his eyes and asked: "Sir, how soon do I start to die?"

Wow, what a story of commitment! You see, even though this young boy mistakenly thought he would die by giving his sister a pint of his blood, he still pressed forward in carrying out this life-saving mission of love.

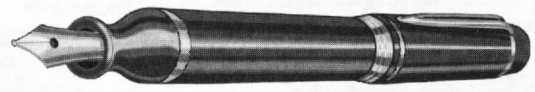
Prayer: Lord God, help us to honor our sacred commitment to love You, O God, and our neighbors. Continue to bless and watch over our comrades serving in harm's way and their loved-ones back home. ***Amen.***

May God help us to love our families and others like this youngster loved his little sister.

In faith and friendship,
Chaplain Mark.

(The opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.)

Letter to the Editor



Not the first!

Your article titled "Special pin honors Civilian service in Iraq war zone" (*Engineer Update*, July 2005, page three) is not accurate in that this pin is definitely *not* the first war zone recognition for civilians in U.S. history. This is probably the first war zone recognition by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but definitely *not* the *first* recognition.

I was deployed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, by the Corps of Engineers, during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Since I served in a war zone, I received a DoD ribbon (same as the military decorations) for my service as a Civilian.

Steve Purdy
Albuquerque District

(Thank you for setting the record straight. That's an occupational hazard whenever a journalist says that anything is the biggest, fastest, first, or any other superlative. ***– Editor****)*

Commentary

'I wanted to make a difference...'

By Renee' Willis-Williams
Afghanistan Engineer District

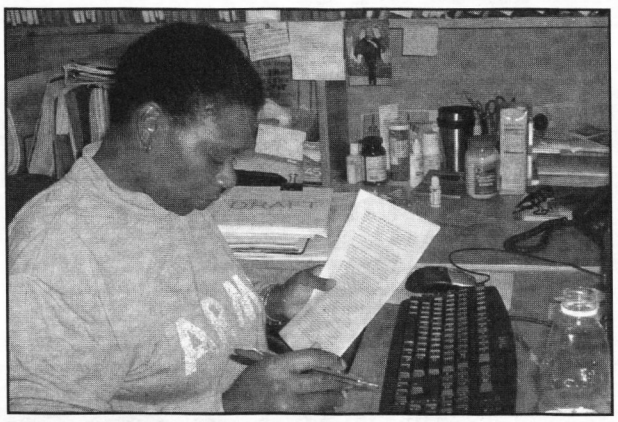
My story is like most people who come to Afghanistan. In some small way, I wanted to make a difference by aiding in the recovery of the Afghan people, with an emphasis on women's health issues and the improvement of the infant mortality rate, which is one of the highest in the world – 147 deaths for every 1,000 live births.

As a woman and a mother of twin three-year old boys, who are being cared for by my husband while I'm in Afghanistan, I couldn't begin to imagine what it would be like to lose a child.

Any woman, who has ever cared for a precious life, I can empathize with the plight of the Afghan woman. The children here are threatened with obstacles that take them all too soon, something I could not fathom before arriving here.

As I've watched my own two boys grow, in leaps and bounds, during the past 36 months of their lives, I received so much joy from them, and it breaks my heart to know that many of the expectant mothers here in Afghanistan will not get the chance to experience the joy of motherhood, which is why I was moved to come to Afghanistan and assist with the Kabul, Rabia-E-Balkhi Women's Hospital project in anyway that I could.

Knowing that the work we do here immediately impacts the peoples' lives awakens me every morning feeling blessed.



Renee Willis-Williams works overtime on a Sunday night in Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy of Afghanistan Engineer District)

To see the medical staff, with Afghan women back at work, is overwhelming. The prior systematic discrimination against these women by the Taliban halted the education and progress of Afghan women. And for those women who came back to this country to work, they were persecuted and killed.

My witnessing, first-hand, how the Afghan people have worked so hard to maintain what little function they have in this hospital facility is truly remarkable.

I now have a newfound respect for old-fashioned ingenuity. For instance, in the daytime something as simple as keeping the lights off and not powering up the radiology department until absolutely needed protects their 30-year-old electrical boards from burning out.

The electrical and boiler plant replacement is another of Afghanistan Engineer District's projects. But until it is finished only "just in time power," which means don't stock it or supply it until you have an order for it, is given to the hospital.

Besides working on the women's hospital, I'm also involved in various other projects.

Since arriving in country June 4, I've been working on the Afghan National Army (ANA) initiatives to build brigade housing, training facilities, a new Judicial Center, and the ANA Hospital.

Working on the ANA Hospital project for the past month has been the most fascinating and rewarding thing I have done in my life, next to being a wife and a twin mother of course.

What allows me to be thousands of miles from my husband and twins is a large family, particularly my mother-in-law, Meredith Williams, nieces and nephews, two brothers, four sisters, and my girlfriends who are all with me in spirit. Without their loving support I could not make it here because I miss them all. We stay in contact mostly via e-mail.

(Renee' Willis-Williams is a native of Richmond, Va. She is a contract specialist attached to Afghanistan Engineer District for 140 days on a temporary duty assignment with permission from her command, the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command in Arlington, Va.)

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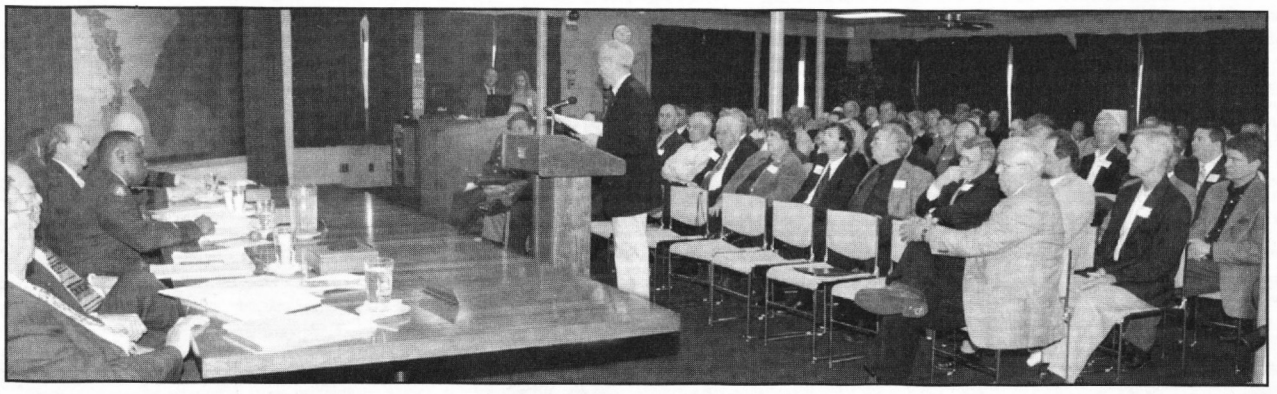
Miss. River Commission marks 125 years

By Brenda Beasley
Memphis District



Citizens from the New Madrid, Mo., area testify before the Mississippi River Commission. (Photo courtesy of Memphis District)

"On a warm summer day in August 1879, seven men, each appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes and confirmed by the U.S. Senate, gathered in Washington, D.C., to pore over surveys, examinations, and reports representing the best available hydraulic data on the Mississippi River. Six of the men were prominent civil engineers, the seventh a lawyer, constitutional scholar, and future American President.

"These seven men represented the original members of the Mississippi River Commission…Upon their shoulders rested the task of remaking the Mississippi River into a safe and reliable commercial artery while protecting adjacent lands from overflow. The job at hand was enormous — so enormous that no less an authority on the Mississippi River than Mark Twain believed the task was 'transcended in size only by the original job of creating the river.'"

These words from *Upon Their Shoulders* by Charles Camillo and Matthew Pearcy describe how the Mississippi River Commission (MRC) began 125 years ago.

On a warm spring day last April, seven different men, each appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, gathered in Vicksburg, Miss., to celebrate the final event of the 125th anniversary of the MRC with simultaneous Open Houses at the MRC Building and onboard the Motor Vessel *Mississippi.*

An estimated 1,800 people toured the building and vessel during the April 20 open house events. The hallways of the three-story MRC Building, located at 1400 Walnut Street in downtown Vicksburg, were adorned with museum-quality displays that showcased the commission's work in the Mississippi Valley. The building itself is regarded as the finest example of Romanesque architecture in Mississippi, and serves as headquarters for both the MRC and Mississippi Valley Division (MVD).

The anniversary events culminated onboard the M/V *Mississippi*, docked at the Vicksburg City Front, with a special cake-cutting ceremony honoring the commission. Participants included Vicksburg Mayor Laurence Leyens, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, Chief of Engineers Lt. Gen. Carl Strock, and MVD Commander and MRC President-designee Brig. Gen. Robert Crear.

The M/V *Mississippi* also served as a public meeting venue for the commission's annual high-water inspection trip prior to the open house event. The commission conducts inspection trips on the Mississippi River during the high-water season each spring and during the low-water season each summer or fall. The M/V *Mississippi*, largest towboat in the U.S., serves as an inspection boat and workboat for the commission. Based in Memphis, Tenn., more than 90 percent of the vessel's time is spent as a working towboat for Memphis District.

The purpose of the MRC is to develop plans to improve the condition of the river, foster navigation, promote commerce, and prevent destructive floods. On April 18, while the M/V *Mississippi* was docked at New Madrid, Mo., for a public meeting, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) John Paul Woodley Jr. joined the 125th anniversary celebration voyage.

"It's a very exciting thing for me to be a part of the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Mississippi River Commission," said Woodley in a Soldiers Radio & Television interview with Jini Ryan. "The idea that we can have a commission of this kind working with the Corps of Engineers to do this important work for a region of the country that is the true heartland of America is a very exciting experience for me, because it's a real expression of American democracy at work."

The commission was established June 28, 1879, and is composed of seven members, each nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Three of the MRC's members are officers of the Corps of Engineers; one member is from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); and three members are civilians, two of whom are civil engineers.

The Motor Vessel *Mississippi*, the largest towboat in the U.S., is the flagship of the Mississippi River Commission. (Photo courtesy of Memphis District)

General duties of the commission include providing recommendations to the Chief of Engineers and reports to Congress on matters concerning river improvements, navigation, flood control, flood damage reduction, ecosystem management, recreation, and other major watershed projects and issues, and making semi-annual inspection trips.

The 1879 congressional legislation that created the commission granted the body extensive authority and jurisdiction on the Mississippi River from its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minn., to the Head of Passes near the Gulf of Mexico.

The MRC commissioners ensure that public views are reported to Washington so the policy makers can set priorities and provide the resources. "We're the eyes and ears for Congress and the administration," said Crear. "We're able to review the conditions of the Mississippi River and see, firsthand, projects under construction or completed on or near the river."

The work of the commission is directed by its president and carried out by the six Army Engineer Districts at St. Paul, Rock Island, St. Louis, Memphis, Vicksburg, and New Orleans.

Over the years, as the MRC's mission evolved, and so did its work. "The fundamental work of flood control has been almost constant," said Woodley. "But it certainly accelerated after the flood of 1927."

As steamboats gave way to barges and towboats, the navigation work changed. The Corps developed and built the great system of locks and dams on the upper Mississippi River to support navigation all the way from St. Paul to St. Louis.

But the most recent aspect that has changed is the emphasis on environmental and ecosystem restoration up and down the basin. "Man's activities have affected this ecosystem," said Woodley. "We're learning more and more every day about those effects and what we can do to ameliorate them and to compensate for them so that we continue to have a vital environmental ecosystem for wildlife and fish."

Woodley sees the commission remaining as a relevant service to the nation for another 125 years because it's based on an opportunity for public input at the grass roots level. "The commission visits countless communities up and down the river and brings this body of government to the people in a very real and personal way," said Woodley. "And being able to address people in that way makes it a unique body."

When the commission was first set up in 1879, the river was un-navigable, said civil engineer and MRC Commissioner R.D. James in an SRTV interview with Ryan. It was overrun with logjams and sand bars.

The commission's first task was to clear the river of debris and make it navigable. In 1928, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1928 on the heels of the 1927 flood and gave the MRC the additional task of protecting the citizens of the Lower Mississippi Valley from flooding.

In his 24 years as a commissioner, James said he's seen a few dramatic changes, but he feels there'll be even more dramatic changes to come if any of the ageing locks and dams on the upper Mississippi River fail. "If we ever have one of those fail, it's going to be a disaster," James said.

Although he doesn't want to think of a disaster like this happening, he fears it may be the only thing that will bring national attention to the valley's aging infrastructure. "It's not just in the Mississippi River Valley," said James, "It's happening all over the U.S. Our infrastructure is deteriorating. Time takes its toll on infrastructure."

There are so many challenges facing Congress and the administration because of homeland security, the war in Iraq, anti-terrorism, and other world issues, that civil works projects don't get much attention.

"There is so much they have to worry about that when you mention the words 'civil works' they think of faucets and plumbing and that type of thing," said James. "But, it's a lot bigger than that, and we're trying as civilian members of this commission to get that message to Washington as best we can."

It's the very diversity of their makeup that brings a more comprehensive outlook to the commission's decision-making process. The civilian members add a great deal of continuity that offsets the more rapid turnaround of the military members, said Strock in an SRTV interview with Ryan.

The military members represent the three Corps divisions that encompass the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi river valleys. Together these valleys form the greater part of the basin that drains 41 percent of the U.S. and parts of two Canadian provinces.

The Corps has the responsibility of carrying out the work on the Mississippi River and Tributaries project, which is the flagship project that the Commission has put most of their efforts into. "The commission plays a vital role in the Corps' work on the Mississippi River," said Strock. "It's a very important forum for us to make decisions about how to operate and maintain the Mississippi River."

The diverse makeup of the commission combines the expertise of the private sector, the military, and the federal government. "There's no other commission like it anywhere in the U.S.," said Crear.

When viewing the commission in terms of a return on investment, for every dollar spent there has been at least 24 dollars in return. To date, 24 billion dollars has been invested in the MRC with more than 400 billion dollars worth of benefits received.

Corps of Engineers National Water Safety Program thriving, saving lives

By Bernard Tate
Headquarters

Our National Water Safety Program (NSPS) began for the very best reason...to save lives. In 1971, there were nearly 600 drownings at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes. The reason for that high number is simple...we have the water. The Corps owns 456 lakes in 43 states, and we host 30 percent of the recreational use of all federal lands.

"1971 was the year that the issue really caught the eye of the Chief of Engineers," said Lynda Nutt, Manager of the Corps' National Operations Center for Water Safety. That led to the Corps' first water safety conference, and a new role for USACE.

A park ranger at Clearwater Lake in Arkansas shows a young visitor how to put on a life jacket. (Photo by Laurie Driver, from the Digital Visual Library)

Evolution

The Corps water safety program evolved slowly. Through the 1970s, water safety was a local operation. Park rangers at local Corps water projects created their own water safety products and taught safety programs at their water resource projects.

Beginning in the early 1980s, the water safety program centralized in the Information Management (IM) Branch of Headquarters, which produced water safety posters, brochures, and other education materials for field, funded by the Operations budget.

But in 1994, Information Management reorganized, and it seemed as if the centralized water safety program would end. Nutt, then an outdoor recreation planner in Walla Walla District, came in to do developmental work with IM.

"I think I was selected because I was a whiner," said Nutt, and laughed. "I was one of those people in the field who constantly called Chuck (Gregory, visual information manager at the time) and said, 'You're not giving us what we need as the customer.' So Chuck basically told me to put my money where my mouth is and come here to Headquarters and help him figure out what to do.

"It kind of scared me when I found out they were going to do away with the water safety program," Nutt continued. "I went to the Chief of Natural Resources at the time, Darrell Lewis, and talked to Tony Brunner, Chuck's supervisor who headed up the visual information program, and Chuck. We sat down and I proposed that we find a way to save the water safety program, and if they would entrust it to me, I would coordinate the materials so we could keep the program going. And they liked the idea."

Grass roots

So Nutt became the part-time manager of the National Operations Center (NOC) for Water Safety in Walla Walla District in 1994, and took the job full-time in 1998. The NOC is now located in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho.

"I had a couple of goals when I agreed to take this program," said Nutt. "One is that I would make it grass-roots. To me this needed to be a customer-driven program. It didn't do us any good to create materials and put them out if it wasn't what the park rangers needed and it didn't fit their audience."

Nutt organized a National Advisory Committee, what today would be called a project delivery team, consisting of park rangers from all eight national divisions, plus representatives from Safety & Occupational Health and Public Affairs. The NOC functions as a Center of Expertise for water safety education, and performs two basic functions.

"We design and develop water safety products," said Nutt. "I meet twice a year with my National Advisory Committee, and we talk about the products that the park rangers are looking for. We look at our annual statistics, and figure out what our target audiences are, and what issues with that audience that we need to focus on."

Field ideas

The NOC also serves as a clearinghouse and coordination center for water safety ideas from the field.

"A great example of that is Willy B. Safe," said Steve Austin, the Senior Policy Advisor for Park Ranger Activities in Headquarters. "It's a fantastic program that was developed pretty much in the St. Louis District at one project, Wappapello Lake. A park ranger named Willy B. Safe talks about key water safety issues with groups at the lake, and that program was so well received that Lynda included it in the national program so that other Corps water projects can see the materials and use them."

"To me that's where the heartbeat of the program is, in the field," said Nutt. "Those rangers absolutely set me back on my heels with their ideas sometimes. It's amazing what they come up with."

"One of the things they do during their biannual meetings is bring a list of the ideas and suggestions they've gathered from the field," said Austin. "We go through those lists and see which ones that we might be able to use."

Some of those ideas include:

Videos – The National Operations Center has produced several videos for use in classrooms. "Water Safety Story" is a history of the water safety program and an overview of the products offered. "Safe Passage" is an action-adventure video for elementary school students, and "The Young and the Reckless" is a comedy that targets middle school students.

Both "Safe Passage" and "The Young and the Reckless" are designed for use in the classroom, including a teachers guide and student activities for follow-up work. Both have won awards, including an Addy (advertising) Award for Educational Video.

"We use edu-tainment," said Nutt. "We educate through entertainment. "We don't want the kids to know they're being educated; we sneak it in on them."

Bobber the Water Safety Dog – This series of Flash animation cartoons was originally created by Toby Isbell, a visual information specialist in Little Rock District, and Michael Jordan, a Civil Works programs manager for Southwestern Division. Each cartoon, narrated by Don Harris of Fort Worth District and accompanied by gentle bluegrass music, teaches water safety lessons to children through the adventures of Bobber and his friends Corky, Sinker, Tackle, and Ranger Buck at Waterbowl Lake. The Web site at www.bobber.info now carries two cartoons (a third is in development), and games.

Seamoor Safety – Seamoor is a robot sea serpent riding a Jet Ski. A park ranger operates Seamoor by remote control, and can talk with children about water safety via wireless microphone.

Buddy Beaver – This removable head costume of a beaver wearing a life jacket is a big hit with children at Corps lakes. A park ranger who teaches water safety lessons always accompanies buddy.

These, plus safety reminder buttons, skits, ranger trading cards, whistles, throwing disks, coloring books, traveling exhibits, and more are just a few of the other products developed by the National Operations Center for Water Safety Program.

Results

Like its beginning, the water safety program's success can be measured in life and death. In 1971, there were almost 600 drownings at Corps lakes nationwide. By 2004, that number had fallen to 150, despite a ten-fold increase in the number of visitors and recreation hours, and the proliferation of different kinds of boats, especially the motorcycle-like personal watercraft.

Another measure of success is that other federal, state, and local agencies now come to the Corps for water safety information.

"When I first started, I was out there knocking on everybody's door trying to get partnerships and get

people to see the Corps as an agency that knows something about water-based recreation," said Nutt. "It wore me out that first year just making contacts. Now, I'm overwhelmed with requests. They come to us. So the focus has shifted to where the Corps is now a contender when you talk about water safety."

New challenges

But even Nutt and Austin admit that there is more to be done, and even new dangers that are just now being recognized.

Spanish language. "We're working harder to reach the Spanish-speaking community with our products," said Nutt. Just like in the rest of American society, Hispanics are the Corps' fastest-growing recreation segment. "So we've created a bilingual subcommittee on our National Advisory Committee. This is a group of people who speak different dialects of Spanish. When I was trying to create a coloring book in Spanish that would appeal to the Cuban Spanish, and the California Mexican Spanish, and the Tex-Mex Spanish, and the New Mexico Spanish, it was a challenge!"

The Corps now has water safety posters and brochures printed in Spanish, and some of the park rangers have taken elementary Spanish lessons. "But I still see it as a weak area," said Nutt.

Sportsmen. "Our second challenge is outdoor sportsmen, the hunter and the fisherman, who show up in our drowning statistics time and again," said Nutt. "We're focusing on materials that educate them on how they need to change their behavior."

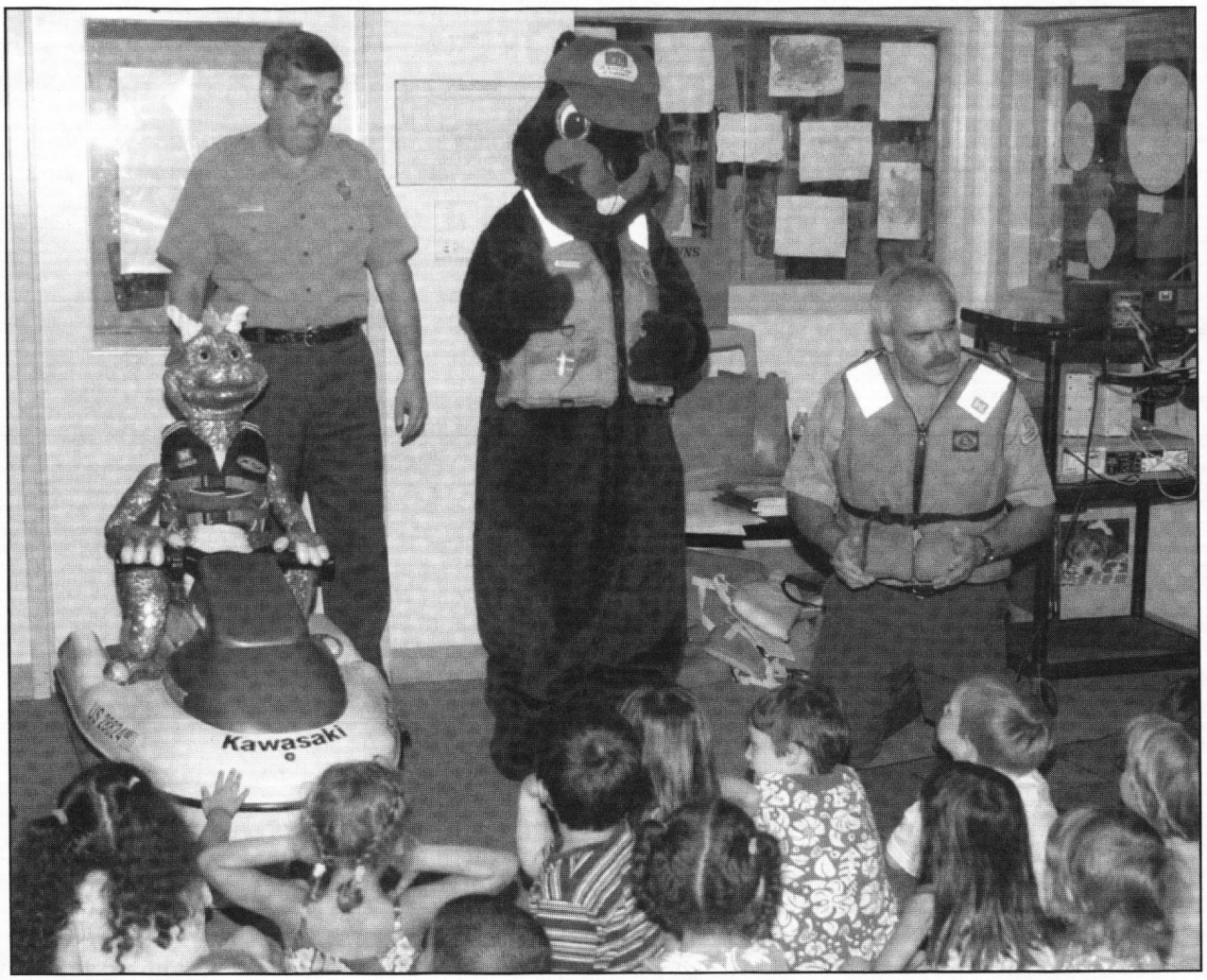
"A hunter in his Jon Boat going out to his blind will tell you that he's not a boater, he's a hunter," said Austin.

Carbon monoxide. And there are new issues arising that no one expected.

"One of those is carbon monoxide poisoning," said Nutt. "Unexplained drownings were occurring in Arizona, and patients were appearing in the emergency room, and a doctor finally picked up that they had carbon monoxide poisoning. Further studies show that even in open-bow boats, there is carbon monoxide. Swimmers that go off boats and suddenly go under, we've always said, 'Well, they probably got a cramp.' New they're finding out that it might have been carbon monoxide from the boat's exhaust.

"New activities like teak-surfing, where kids will hang off that little step in the back of the boat and get pulled through the water," Nutt continued. "They're getting nothing but pure exhaust in their face. And those kids will go down, but the accidents are always attributed to something else.

"So the Corps' national water safety program has made some huge strides in the past several years, but there are always new challenges out there, and plenty of improvements to make," Nutt concluded.



Jeff Pobieglo (standing), a park ranger from Carters Lake in Mobile District, and Eugene Goff, a park ranger from Portland District, discuss water safety with children in the Tiny Findings Daycare Center in the General Accounting Office Building in Washington, D.C. They are assisted by Buddy Beaver and Seemoor Safety. (Photo by F.T. Eyre, Headquarters)

EKO

Continued from page eight

and across other CoPs that need to share information.

ECoP. According to Gregg, "We looked at several options for linking the environmental CoP (eCoP). What appealed to me about EKO has a lot to do with name recognition and its corporate feel. The site is user-friendly with an open architecture, so I could log in and use it without anyone showing me how to use it.

"The security aspect was also important to us," said Grigg. "It allows for multiple project delivery teams to each establish a 'virtual team room' where they can conduct secure threaded discussions limited to their team members. This is similar to the discussion area in Groove, but is available via password from any computer, whether the team members have Groove capability or not. In our reimbursable programs, that will be very beneficial for the customer to participate in those discussions."

To date, more than 600 people have registered in the EKO Portal as members of the eCoP, which is as simple as logging in to Army Knowledge Online (AKO). Larry Barb, environmental engineer at Headquarters, said that persons interested in joining the eCoP can indicate their area of interest in one or more of the eight sub-CoPs which allows the team leader to know who is in the community.

Sub-CoPs. "Our Military Munitions Response Program sub-CoP is way out in front of the others for how they use EKO," Barb says. "Every day the team leader posts new information — presentations from conferences, technical updates, training courses, memos from the Secretariat, and everything else related to munitions response."

"In both society as a whole and government in particular, we're losing our expertise, with many people becoming program managers instead of specializing in more focused technical skills," said Gregg. "That's why EKO is so powerful, because we still have pockets of expertise out there, and this makes it easy to find."

The EKO Portal currently hosts 26 virtual teams, as well as 23 of the 26 USACE CoPs. Site visits average 45,000 per month.

ACPEP Project Delivery Team

The Office of the Provost Marshal General (OPMG) sponsors the ACPEP, which has the goal of improving physical security and personnel safety at Army installation access control points (ACPs) worldwide. The $335 million program has three phases: (1) Providing mobile equipment, (2) Surveying all Army installation ACPs, and (3) Purchasing and installing fixed ACP equipment based on the surveys' findings.

Grigg leads a team of some 100 members, all linked through the EKO Portal, representing HQDA (OPMG and ACSIM), USACE, IMA, installation DPWs & DESs, and MACOMs.

"The three phases were funded at $163 million in direct response to 9/11," Grigg said. "The way we're conducting the program is a new concept for the Corps. Because of the worldwide scope and relatively short planning and execution schedule, the most efficient strategy was to centralize the program management but to decentralize the execution."

HNC is centrally managing ACPEP while the districts complete the work in their regions.

STATREP

One of the most useful features within the EKO Portal is STATREP, which is an automated database for the entire program.

"We used to have 10 or 12 data calls every day because the sponsor's staff needs to track the progress," said Grigg. "A lot of what they wanted was not available in PROMIS. Now everything they want to see is posted on Engineering Knowledge Online and they have access rights to view it. They can see reports specific to regions. For example, they can click a button and see how many closed-circuit TVs are at Fort Bragg."

Besides STATREP's Project Status Database, it contains an Issue Tracker. This feature gives communities and teams the ability to manage open issues and view the history of resolved issues, says Schroeder.

The EKO Portal also has an advanced search feature for some 250,000 documents within the portal and can search five installation management related Web sites — ACSIM, IMA, USACE Military Programs, HESC, and CERL.

For more information about the EKO Portal, please contact Chuck Schroeder at CERL, (217) 373-6726, Charles.G.Schroeder@erdc.usace.army.mil or John Grigg at HNC, (256) 895-1697, John.W.Grigg@usace.army.mil

New Orleans District is 'Active For Life'

By Peggy Plaisance
New Orleans District

New Orleans District has a district-wide fitness program called Active For Life. It is based on the team concept, and it is so effective at helping people lose pounds and inches that other districts have called asking how to set up similar programs.

In July 2004, Col. Peter Rowan, District Commander, approved Active For Life (AFL). The program works by forming teams and working as a team to motivate each other to exercise at least 150 minutes each week. Rowan said, " Team work is what the Corps is all about — working as a team to get the job done."

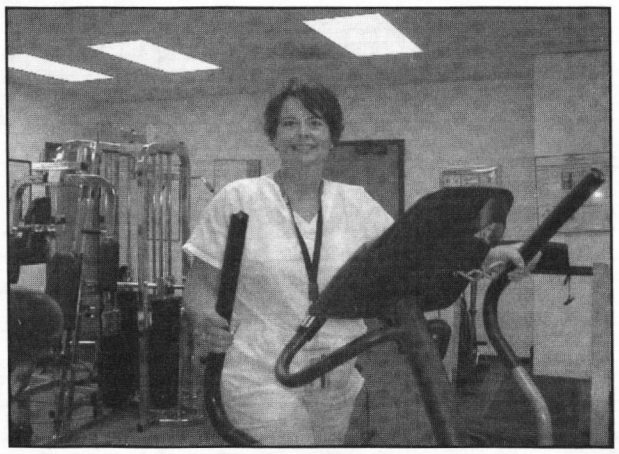
AFL is an American Cancer Society (ACS) program encouraging physical activity for a 10-week period to decrease chances of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. Cheryl Fourcade, ACS representative, helped us to get the program off the ground.

We changed the program a little to suit the needs of New Orleans District. In order to earn a Team Achievement Award, we wanted to make it a challenge as well as a lifestyle change. Employees had to form a team of at least three and no more than 10 members, with a team name and captain, and at least one member had to have been *inactive* (not exercising for at least three months) before starting the program. Each member had to exercise at least 150 minutes, spread out over at least three days a week, for 20 weeks (five months).

To start the program we had a big AFL Kickoff to get people to join, and 396 people signed up for 46 teams. We organized a committee to help with all that is involved with organizing a program this large.

The committee helped plan, implement, and coordinate a pep rally every five weeks. The pep rallies kept members excited, involved, committed, and improved morale. They were used to give instructions about the program, and we invited speakers to give presentations about topics such as lowering cholesterol, exercising safely, and eating healthy.

We also had vendors from health clubs and exercise clinics set up a table to give information to employees. Whole Foods came and gave samples of healthy foods.



Peggy Plaisance, the Wellness Program Coordinator, works out at the fitness center in New Orleans District headquarters. Plaisance started the Active For Life Program in the district, and she has lost 25 pounds on the program. (Photo courtesy of New Orleans District)

We decorated with balloons and gave out door prizes. We showed a slide show of team pictures of all the teams to the music "Let's Get Physical".

We even had a spirit contest for the team that showed the most team spirit by making up a skit or a cheer about their exercise program. They would win a spirit stick and a trip to Whole Foods for lunch.

We had a lot of fun with the program. We gave an award for the best team captain. We gave T-shirts to all participants who reached their goal of at least 150 minutes for the first 10 weeks.

And what was the result of all this rah-rah hoopla? Two hundred and ninety six employees completed the 20 weeks of exercise. Of those, 100 had been inactive before starting the program, and they received a Team Achievement Award from Rowan. We ended the year with a total weight loss of more than 500 pounds and more than 1,100 inches. The ACS now uses New Orleans District as a model in their training classes nationwide.

And Rowan has asked that we continue the AFL program this year, and set these requirements:

- All participants that meet the AFL requirements will get a T-shirt.
- There will be four prize categories — highest team participation rate, highest team cholesterol reduction, highest team inches reduced, and highest team pounds lost.
- Each person on the winning team will receive a $100 Savings Bond.
- At the Kick-off and the End of Program rally, a drawing is held for a $100 and $200 Savings Bond.

We started the 2005 AFL program on Feb. 28 with just over 200 employees (31 teams), of which 47 are inactive people. The rules have relaxed a bit since we are not offering a Team Achievement Award. Each team is not required to have an inactive person on the team to qualify. Everyone still needs to exercise at least 150 minutes per week, but if they miss a week they can make up their time the next week.

We weighed, measured, and drew blood for cholesterol on everyone that wanted to compete for the Savings Bond award. At the end of 20 weeks we will have a pep rally and present awards to the teams that won, and give everyone a T-shirt.

The employees say that this program has really helped to keep them motivated to stick with the program because the team is depending on them to do their 150-plus minutes of exercise, and it's nice to have someone to exercise with. They say they feel better mentally and physically when they exercise, and it is fun to be a part of a team.

And the employees are not the only ones who benefit. Documented studies prove a savings-to-cost ratio of more than $6 saved for each $1 invested in corporate wellness programs. These programs have been proven to reduce health-care costs, lower absenteeism, injury rates, and turnover while improving job performance, productivity, and morale.

The AFL program gave people the opportunity to exercise, become acquainted with coworkers, depend on each other, and inspire one another to meet the team goal. Members have stated that they *do* perform better at their job since they started exercising, and we also have seen a reduction in sick leave use from 2003 to 2004 while the time the program was going on.

HR Corner

NAD's mentor program a good model

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has always recognized that people are truly the most important asset in ensuring mission success. Mentoring is one of the best traditional methods for developing people, and the mentoring program in North Atlantic Division (NAD) is a good example.

NAD's mentoring program was designed to ensure that all division employees have the resources and benefits of the experiences of fellow employees, senior staff, supervisors, and division staff. The program was developed to capitalize on the experience of successful role models who volunteer for a one-to-one advisory relationship with division employees desiring to develop their careers by personal initiative and establishing goals.

Benefits

The program provides benefits such as the transfer of valuable knowledge from seasoned leaders to the potential leaders of the future, and facilitates proficiency in performing new roles and responsibilities under the USACE 2012 concept.

Participation in this program does *not* guarantee career advancement or a position change. However, the mentoring program *does* provide individuals an opportunity to broaden both their educational and professional awareness, and heighten opportunities for meeting chosen goals.

At the same time, the associate (mentee) must understand that the needs of the division and his/her office may take priority over his/her specific goals. In such cases, the supervisor and associate will discuss priorities and determine ways that the associate's goals may be achieved.

Roles

Some of the roles of a mentor include:

- Provides guidance and support in career development.
- Help motivate personal and professional development of associate.
- Gains satisfaction by helping an associate define and attain goals.
- Gains insight into the next generation's interest and capabilities.

Some of the roles of an associate are:

- Increases his/her ability to plan his/her own career.
- Develops short- mid- and long-term goals.
- Enhances opportunities for personal growth.
- Obtains opportunities for feedback and self-evaluation.
- Cultivates job skills to increase productivity.

Two years

The mentorship will be for a minimum of two years. The first year consists of active, scheduled mentoring activities. After the completion of the first year, there will be a minimum of a one-year follow-up period during which the mentor and associate will meet with sufficient frequency to discuss the associate's progress in accomplishing his/her goals.

It is possible that mentors and their mentees might work in different geographic areas. In that case, they will communicate via video teleconference, telephone conference, electronic mail, and funding on-site visits may be an option.

Administration

The Regional Training Coordinator in NAD's Business Management Division, together with the Director of Human Resources, will administer the mentoring program and monitor effectiveness and provide input to the division leadership as needed.

Around the Corps

Combat Pin For Civilian Service

Since the article about the Combat Pin for Civilian Service (CPCS) appeared in the July issue of *Engineer Update,* a number of Corps Civilians who volunteered in Iraq and are now back home have asked how they can obtain their copy.

In addition, Civilians who have volunteered for service in Afghanistan Engineer District (AED) have asked if a similar pin will be available for them.

For Iraq service only, have the commander of your division, district, center, or lab contact Command Sgt. Major Robert Winzenreid, the Corps' Command Sergeant Major, via e-mail or at (202) 761-0833. The commander will request the number of CPCS pins and certificates needed, and present them to Iraq volunteers in the appropriate ceremony.

Discussions are currently underway to design a similar Combat Pin for Civilian Service for those who have volunteered in AED.

Afghanistan refugee housing

Refugees in Afghanistan will soon have much needed housing, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed July 23. Representatives from the Afghanistan Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MUDH), the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), the Kabul Municipality, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Afghanistan Engineer District (AED) signed a MOU on a multi-phase project to provide housing for displaced Afghans. The housing development will be located on 270 acres about two kilometers (about one-and-a-quarter miles) from Janan Kala village in the Chil Dakhtaran area of greater Kabul. The MOU details the group's cooperative efforts to provide dwellings for up to 2,000 displaced families living in Kabul.

CMD Constructors Inc., under contract with USAID, is currently performing the first phase of the project which includes drilling water production wells, setting up a pump station and a pipeline to lift groundwater pumped from the wells to an elevated storage reservoir, also under construction. As an added benefit, the Boys' School in Janan Kala village will receive a water pipeline, and the village itself a frost-free tap.

Under Phase 2, AED with input from the two ministries and the Kabul Municipality will provide master planning/site development for up to 2,000 housing units. Besides the locations of housing units, the planning document will include areas set aside for up to three schools, up to two clinics, a community center, a site office for a municipality building, and neighborhood parks.

The development site has been de-mined, and AED will provide subsurface de-mining along with site grading and storm water management, water lines connecting to the source provided by CMD, a water distribution center for every four to five houses, and primary and secondary roads.

Phase 3 of the project uses a variation of the Habitat for Humanity concept. USAID and AED will give training in the construction skills needed to build a home to the refugees, who will then build their homes. The dwellings themselves will be 50 square meters (about 54 square yards), single level, four-room housing units with two living/sleeping areas, a food prep area, and a wash area.

"The project is wonderful," said AED project manager Shannon Swartz. "It will not only provide displaced Afghans homes but will also provide the skills training needed for future employment. It will enable participants to literally build their own community."

According to the MOU, MUDH, MoRR, and the Kabul Municipality will work together to create Community Development Councils among the beneficiaries that will nominate construction trainees from among families selected to participate in the project. They will also ensure the homeowner-laborers working on the project have transportation to the job site and that they arrive on time.

Upon completion of a housing unit, the Government of Afghanistan will transfer title to the housing unit and the plot of land associated with it to the Kabul Municipality which will hold its title for 10 years in trust for the beneficiary family. Afterwards, it will transfer the title to the family.

Architect & Interior Designer of the Year

Jerry Taylor was chosen as the USACE 2005 Interior Designer of the Year. Terry Deglandon received the same honor for 2005 Architect of the Year. They will each be recognized with a plaque from the Chief of Engineers at the Senior Leaders Conference banquet in Dallas this August.

Along with the honor comes responsibility. Taylor and Deglandon will serve on the Architectural Community of Practice Advisory Council for two years.

Some of the 100 beds on their way to the Al Fayhaa Hospital.

Beds for Iraq

When Barry Kountz, Basrah Oil Office project engineer for GRD South District discovered 100 beds that weren't being used by the oil camp, he decided to donate them to a needy group in Basrah.

The bunk beds, originally purchased by Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR), which provides logistical services to the oil camp, were ordered for housing units, but weren't used because of religious beliefs of the guards for whom they were intended. KBR realigned the surplus for the donation.

Kountz contacted Hanna (last name withheld for security reasons), a translator working with the Corps, to see if she knew of any group that needed the beds. She immediately contacted the Al Fayhaa Hospital's general manager, Dr. Abdul Amier, and he was thrilled with the donation. Kountz took care of the paperwork and the coordination between KBR and Hanna.

Three trips were necessary to remove the beds from the camp. The trucks were escorted to the hospital by members of the Project and Contracting Office (PCO), the Basrah Palace Resident Office, the Basrah Area Office, and the Basrah Oil Office.

"I believe we are making some positive steps," said Hanna. "The Iraqi people have come to know many of the Corps, PCO, and KBR employees, and there are a lot of good relations."

Dive safety workshop

Portland District is hosting the Corps' annual dive safety workshop, "From Mark Vs to ROVs: Dive into the Future," Aug. 30 through Sept. 1.

The workshop will be held in Portland, Ore., with support and funding from Corps' Headquarters Safety and Occupational Health Office. The workshop's goal is to promote program consistency across the Corps and provide a forum for increasing technical knowledge.

In support of the Chief of Engineers' vision to "maintain active Communities of Practice (CoP) to help maintain technical competence and to share knowledge," the workshop includes training, lectures, and discussions that will provide practical tools to aid us in fulfilling this charge.

Several critical issues will be discussed, from revision of Section 30, EM 385-1-1, "Contract Diving Operations" to the new training course being offered next year for Diving Coordinators and Safety Officer Representatives. This is your chance to make your opinion known, share information with your peers, enhance your technical skills, and help develop the diving CoP.

For additional information and to register for this event, please see the Portland District Dive Program Web site at www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/diving, or contact Donald Hibbs (Donald.K.Hibbs@nwp01.usace.army.mil) at (503) 808-4312.

Iraq sandbags

If you're shoring up the riverbank to stem floodwaters, you want sandbags that will eventually disintegrate so they don't have to be retrieved. But if you're using sandbags to fortify base camps in Iraq, you want them to stay intact as long as possible.

Sandbag materials differ in their resistance to the elements, especially ultraviolet radiation (UV). In response to reports that sandbag fortifications have failed under Iraq's intense sunlight, the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) conducted a study to identify what materials maintain tensile strength the longest with UV exposure.

The Construction Engineering Research Laboratory (CERL) found through independent, certified laboratory testing that cotton duck material performs best in a simulated desert climate. Acrylic sandbags also performed well in the study.

The complete report with test data is available at www.cecer.army.mil. For more information, please contact Alfred Beitelman or Charles Marsh at CERL, 800-USA-CERL.

Pol-e-charki water treatment system

The wastewater treatment system at the Pol-e-charki base for the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) is well underway. Tank assembly on the system continues, tank leakage testing has been completed, and the booster pump and parallel system replacement water pumps has been commissioned.

The wastewater treatment plant is part of a $130 million project to build 167 structures including barracks, training, administration, and support facilities for 6,700 ANA Soldiers at Pol-e-charki.

"This state-of-the-art system can be expanded if the base gets larger," said Joe Zacot, quality assurance representative. "It will improve sanitary conditions on the installation and in the environment."

The ANA program calls for construction projects not only at Pol-e-charki but also in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif, and Darualman. It is funded through the Foreign Military Assistance Program appropriated by Congress, as well as contributions from the United Kingdom and other international donors.

The program totals $575 million, and the completed facilities will support more than 41,000 Afghanistan National Army troops.

What's your question?

Engineering Knowledge Online Portal has the answer!

By Dana Finney
Construction Engineering Research Laboratory

If it seems like you spend all your time answering data calls, searching for information, and trying to find out who has the answers you need, fire up your computer and log onto https://eko.usace.army.mil. The Engineering Knowledge Online (EKO) Portal can help!

The EKO Portal is a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers knowledge management tool originally developed for the Installation Support Community of Practice (CoP) that now serves the entire Army engineering community. A "portal" differs from a stationary Web site in that it allows users to post their own information, provides searchable links to millions of Web sites, and enables an almost limitless number of applications to be launched.

"In a previous job, when I needed to have something posted on the Web, I had to go to the webmaster, who was always overwhelmed, and it would sometimes be six months before the information got out," says John Grigg, program manager for the Access Control Point Equipment Program (ACPEP) at Huntsville Engineering and Support Center (HNC). "I almost resorted to bribery."

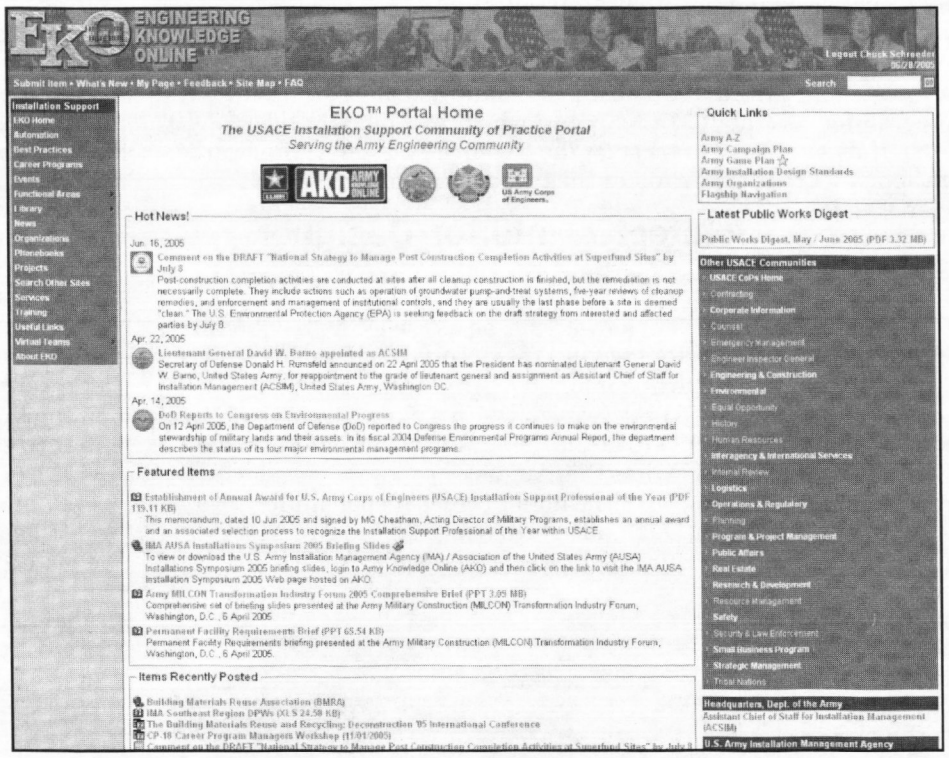
In addition to requiring a webmaster's skills for posting, these sites tend to have the content managed according to institutional business paradigms, where knowledge belongs to an organization and not a business area.

"When installation managers were looking for information, they first had to understand the Corps' organizational hierarchy. For example, to find information about protective design, they had to know that an Omaha District exists," said Chuck Schroeder, project manager at the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC).

Beginnings

Grigg and Schroeder have led a multi-agency effort to create the EKO Portal as a means to facilitate information sharing within the Army engineering community. The need for a portal capability first emerged when the Center for Public Works (CPW) closed. Installation support experts were to be moved to Regional Business Centers and other field agencies. Kristine Allaman, who leads the Installation Support (IS) Community and was Director of the former Installation Support Division at Headquarters, promoted this concept after ERDC's Construction Engineering Research Laboratory (CERL) briefed her on how to use portals for knowledge management.

According to Grigg, who was with CPW at the time, "We were going to be scattered all over the place, but needed to stay connected to a central team because of all the institutional knowledge in our group. Most problems in the DPW world have already been solved, but how do people get the solutions?"



This is one of the screens from the Engineering Knowledge Online Portal.

Features

Among the EKO Portal's user-friendly features:

- Hosts both public and secure pages, using authentication through Army Knowledge Online (AKO) accounts required for all Department of the Army employees.
- Easily customizable page layout and use of numerous programs.
- No Web development expertise needed to manage pages or content.
- Web-based collaboration for workgroups.
- Users can receive email alerts when something new of interest has been posted.

The EKO Portal today is growing exponentially, partly due to the changing culture within the Corps.

"We want to encourage everyone in the environmental community to register on the portal, which is open and available for sharing information — with only some minor oversight to ensure we don't become a data junkyard," said Ken Gregg, team leader for the environmental CoP at Headquarters. "Rather than use EKO as a method of tasking people to do things, we want it to motivate them and make them feel empowered to lend their expertise to help improve the way the Army and the Corps do business."

Evolution

Underlying the success of the EKO Portal is the way it evolved — by first understanding the DPW function, then mapping the process, and finally adapting technology to streamline knowledge management.

The EKO Portal's development has been a constant collaborative effort. Leading the charge, Grigg brought many years of installation DPW experience to EKO's development, while Schroeder is an expert in Web-based knowledge management tools. "We call ourselves 'Bubba and the professor'," Grigg laughs. "And I'm not the professor."

The EKO Portal is providing the framework for connecting numerous virtual teams, including those responsible for critical Army missions.

Army Transformation and BRAC

Sally Parsons is one of those public servants who can't seem to take on enough work. As a program manager (PM) at the Engineering & support Center, Huntsville after Sept. 11, 2001, she was charged with heading up a program to help secure entry points at Army installations along with an already full workload. Called the Access Control Point Equipment Program (ACPEP), this effort had been tasked to the Corps from the Office of the Provost Marshal General.

Parsons suggested using the emerging EKO Portal to help manage the program and began working with Grigg, who later took over the ACPEP program. That was because, meanwhile, Army Transformation was gaining momentum, and the Corps needed to respond. Parsons was assigned as PM for transformation missions including Army Modular Force/Stationing Actions, Military Construction transformation, and later, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) support.

"When you're making major changes to a program, there is an increased need for information exchange so that people can separate rumors from what's real," said Parsons. "With the accelerated pace and interim gap in guidance, people didn't understand the rules for acquiring temporary facilities and who they could contact for help with other issues such as economic analyses."

Enter the EKO Portal and a customized site for bringing together all the players in these important functions. "We're working with the Installation Management Agency (IMA) to ensure that requirements analysis and planning charrettes for Army Modular Force structures are uniform and meet standards set by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management," she said.

The EKO Portal automates Parson's communication, scheduling and reporting functions, while allowing other features such as a dynamic calendar, threaded (and captured) discussions, and workflow organized by IMA regional office. It culls information from requirements analysis, DD 1391 development, and planning charrettes when an installation will be receiving new Brigade Combat Teams.

"EKO helps us coordinate and get information out to people," Parsons says. "It's also helping us share what we've learned from six industry forums in terms of how you can reduce construction time by up to 50 percent using industry standards."

Communities of Practice

Installation Support. When Allaman wanted to use a portal to connect the IS community, USACE 2012 did not yet exist and few in the Corps had heard of a "community of practice." However, CERL had been working with the Department of the Navy, which was refining this business practice, and showed Allaman the advantages of managing information and collaboration in this way.

After the Installation Support CoP was off and running, and Headquarters reorganized under CoPs instead of stovepipes, it became clear that the EKO Portal could be a powerful tool in linking communities both internally

Continued on page five