

HEARTLAND ENGINEER



KANSAS CITY DISTRICT'S NEWS MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2006



TOEING THE LINE FOR LEADERSHIP

FEATURES

THE POWER OF ONE — 6

Greg Wilson and Joe Lopez of the Kansas City District, each with a different mission, volunteered to deploy to the Hurricane Katrina disaster area. The experience touched their lives.

LDP — 8

The 2006 class was "put through their paces" during their team-bonding exercise at the Leadership Reaction Course at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. The experience was meant to challenge tomorrow's leaders.

IF YOU BUILD IT... — 12

The Kansas City District has a lot of work coming its way, but isn't expected to get substantially bigger. Regionalization is part of the strategy for handling the workload.



Photo by Jennie Wilson

Eileen Nistetter of the Kansas City District Human Resources is locked in the pokey for 30 minutes. Corporate Pokey was one of the events held to raise money for the Combined Federal Campaign. These stories will be detailed in future issues of Heartland Engineer. (Photo by Jennie Wilson, IM)

COLUMNS

NEWSWATCH

Newsbriefs from around the District and around the Corps.



PEOPLEPOWER

Meet the new Equal Employment Opportunity Manager who joins the Kansas City District from the Little Rock District.



LASTWORD

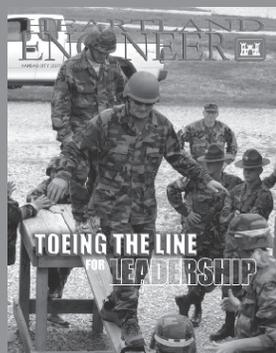
Tom O'Hara discusses the power of saying hello.



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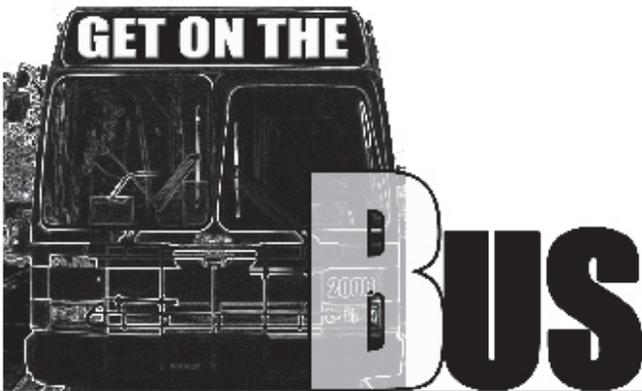
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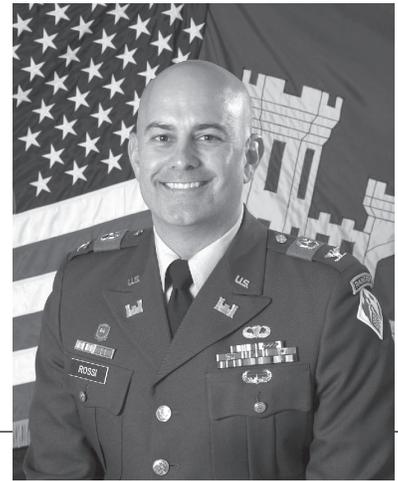
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ON THE COVER: Willem Helms and Craig Litteken undertake a challenge for LDP.

Photo by Allison Choike



COL Michael A. Rossi



At the Town Hall on October 24, I reviewed our success in FY05 and presented the District's goals and strategies for FY06. We all have a lot on our plate. FY05 saw a 50% increase in workload for the District over our historic production. Today, FY06 projections are over 100% of normal, or double, the workload. As I told you at the Town Hall we're not getting much bigger, so we're going to have to be better. A key to being better is setting a direction and priorities.

Our FY06 goals and strategies follow from the USACE Campaign Plan I briefed you in the summer. In that plan, LTG Strock outlined four key success factors in his Vision—**Relevant, Ready, Responsive, Reliable**. Our values, capabilities, agility and contributions make us *Relevant* to our Armed Forces and the Nation. We understand and anticipate the needs of our partners, customers and the Nation, so when we are needed, we are *Ready* to provide support and solutions. Our emphasis on selfless service, putting the mission and those we serve before ourselves, and maintaining our technical capabilities make us *Responsive*. We understand that the people we serve count on us to respond quickly. Those we serve will consider us *Reliable* because we meet our commitments, are accountable for our actions and wisely use the resources entrusted to our care.

From these success factors—*Relevant, Ready, Responsive, Reliable*—I've set out four goals to focus our efforts this year. Those goals are **Mission, Workforce, Business, and Relationships**. Accomplishing the *Mission* for us goes straight to the "one thing" I've talked to you about so often in the past—Project Delivery.

Accomplishing the *Mission* for us is simply delivering quality projects on time and on budget. Accomplishing the *Mission* is an attitude and a test of will for the Team. Our *Workforce* is absolutely key to our long-term success.

As stated above, we're not getting much bigger so we, the *Workforce*, must get better. In "Good to Great," author Jim Collins captures it best: (paraphrasing) Great companies get the right people on the bus, get the wrong people off the bus, and worry about where people sit later. If you've got the right people on the bus, the organization doesn't spend time and resources motivating, checking up on, or disciplining them—it spends resources training them, their internal drive causes them to excel.

There's a *Business* aspect to our mission. We have customers and they pay us for a service. Our *Business* practices have been our strength over the years. Our rates—the price we charge our customers—are the lowest around. This is a testament to our *Business* and financial practices. I want to sustain that strength so the Kansas City District can continue to be the best deal in the Division and USACE.

Relationships are defined by communications and trust. This goes back to Project Delivery in a very real way. We've got to have a plan to tell our story to our customers. Information Technology is a means to an end. In the case of *Relationships*, it's a means to communicate our story and our commitments to our customers and each other. Once we make that commitment, we've got to build trust by always keeping our word.

As I briefed you at the Town Hall, we're implementing eight strategies to achieve these goals: *PMBOK-driven Project Delivery, Contracting Campaign Plan to CX, NSPS Done Right, "80 by 180," Money Watch, Shape Regional Rates and Practices, Communications Campaign Plan, and Optimize IT*. More on those later.

Thanks for all you do and Happy FY06!

IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT MOVES FORWARD

WASHINGTON— While Iraq's political process moves forward and its security forces become more capable, a less dramatic but equally critical effort is under way and proceeding steadily, a defense official said today.

Iraq is awirl with activity as the country works with the help of the Iraq Project Contracting Office to repair and ultimately take over the management of its infrastructure systems, Sheryl Lewis, the office's capacity development program manager, said during an interview with the Pentagon Channel.

The Iraq Project and Contracting Office contracts for and delivers services, supplies and infrastructure identified within the \$18.4 billion Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction Fund Congress authorized in 2003.

The three-year program is responsible for projects throughout Iraq's 18 provinces. In addition to giving the Iraqis a foundation for rebuilding infrastructure in several critical areas, it creates jobs and helps eliminate unemployment, officials said.

Lewis maintains a database that tracks contractor and subcontractor activity involving four major sectors: oil; electricity; public works and water; and facilities, transportation, communication, health and education.

"We get a very good picture of what each contractor is doing and how well they are doing in meeting their goals," she said. "There are a lot of good-news stories coming out of this."

The U.S. government, recognizing the link between reestablishing these sectors and Iraq's emergence as a stable, secure country, has been deeply involved in these reconstruction efforts for more than two years.

Officials cite Iraq's oil industry, which provides 94 percent of the Iraqi government's revenues, as one of the most important focuses. Revenues generated through oil exports are key to the success of all government ministries that provide essential infrastructure services to the Iraqi people, they point out.

But steady progress is evident in all four sectors, with long-neglected systems receiving essential maintenance and repairs and Iraqis training to take over the systems in the future, Lewis said.

Some of the concepts covered in the training are relatively new to the Iraqis,

who often operated under a "run-it- until-breaks" philosophy under former dictator Saddam Hussein or jury-rigged systems rather than fix them to keep them operating, Lewis acknowledged.

"You're changing attitudes," she said of the training. "And you are changing ways of doing things that have been there for 20 or 30 years under Saddam's regime."

Changing those behaviors "is going to be a very long-term project," Lewis acknowledged. "It's not something that's going to change overnight."

Lewis said she's impressed by Iraqis' hard work and commitment as they ensure their facilities are sustainable and that they have the skills they need to keep them operational.

"You know that there's potential there. They are smart people. They really are hard-working," Lewis said, adding that Iraqis want to reestablish their infrastructure systems and bring them up to capacity. - *By Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service*

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

November is National American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month. This year's theme is "Honoring Heritage... Strengthening Our Nation's Spirit." The observance will include displays on the 6th, 7th & 8th floors of the Richard Bolling Federal Building, reflecting many historical and modern day aspects and contributions of the American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and communities. The 7th floor display will also include a computer kiosk, displaying different PowerPoint presentations and videos, tracing Indian History from 30,000 BC through today. PowerPoint presentations are also available for viewing by going to the District's Intranet website, clicking on "Departments," then on "Equal Opportunity," and finally, on American Indian/Alaskan Native Program."

DISTRICT BUMPER STICKER CONTEST

As announced at the Town Hall, the Commander has initiated a 'bumper sticker' contest within the Kansas City District to capture in an image, slogan, message, etc... his intent for the District to be the lead district in customer service (as explained during the Town Hall - video of the Town Hall available online). All Kansas City District employees (minus the senior leaders on the selection

panel) are eligible.

All entries should be emailed, snail mailed, or delivered to Diana McCoy in the Public Affairs office before Nov 30. Mrs. McCoy will record the name of the designer and separate those from the entries themselves to ensure impartiality of the reviewers.

A panel of senior district leaders will narrow the field to 3 finalists. A brief online district survey will evaluate the finalists and the commander will make his selection based upon the senior leader's recommendation, the survey, and his own judgment.

The designer of the winning entry will receive a \$500 cash award. Please direct all questions to Diana McCoy in the Public Affairs Office, (816) 983-3485.

NSPS REGULATIONS FINALIZED

The Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon R. England and Director of Office of Personnel Management Linda M. Springer announced at a press conference October 26, that the regulations for National Security Personnel System (NSPS) have been finalized and submitted to the Federal Register. This event marks another major milestone in a rigorous design effort that has been ongoing since the spring of last year. The finalized regulations contain revisions that were the result of over 58,000 comments received during the public comment period and input from DoD's employee representatives during the meet and confer period. The final regulations define the rules for implementing a new human resources system that will affect about 700,000 DoD civilian employees regarding pay and classification, performance management, hiring, workforce shaping, disciplinary matters, appeals procedures and labor-management relations. - *National Security Personnel System.*

PLEASE SEND COMMENTS TO HEARTLAND ENGINEER

To foster two-way communication within the District, the Heartland Engineer welcomes your letters to the editor, guest commentaries and ideas. If you have something to share, please contact Tom O'Hara, public affairs chief, (816) 983-3486 (thomas.a.o'hara@usace.army.mil). -*Kansas City District Public Affairs*



Meet the New EEO Manager

By Diana McCoy

A fresh face has recently joined the Kansas City District from Little Rock, Ark., and with it comes a wide array of experiences which will aid as the new Equal Employment Opportunity Manager.

Natalie Joiner has been employed with the US Army Corps of Engineers twelve years, serving in the Little Rock District most recently for the past year as an EEO Specialist/Acting EEO Manager.

"I originally came to the Corps as a student employee enrolled in the Student Temporary Experience Program," Joiner said. "I realized the great opportunities and benefits the Corps had to offer, so I decided to continue my career with the Corps."

Joiner also saw great potential for career development and advancement. In addition to serving as an EEO specialist for the Little Rock District, she has held several other positions within the Corps.

Student work experiences included: Contracting Division, Procurement, Supplies and Services, and the Emergency Management Office.

"My first permanent position was with the Engineering and Construction Division, Construction Branch," Joiner said. "Since then, I have worked in Job Order Contracting, Cost Engineering and Programs and Project Management Division."

Joiner's educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Social Psychology and a minor in Business Management. She also has a Master's degree in Human Resource Management.

"I enjoy all aspects of my life and welcome new challenges," Joiner said.

She is no stranger to challenges. Joiner is currently pursuing a Doctoral of Management in Organizational Leadership from the University of Phoenix.

"I've also enjoyed the challenge of being an Operating Room Specialist in Labor and Delivery and at a local women's clinic," Joiner said. "I became an Operating Room Specialist/combat medic during my tenure with the Arkansas Army National Guard."

Two of her most recent challenges were the Personal and Professional Enhancement Program, a one-year leadership development program, which she graduated from in August. She also completed the Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Program.

"While in Kansas City District I would like to fulfill the mission of the EEO Office... 'To provide proactive services to district employees, managers, and supervisors such as training, affirmative employment planning initiatives and special emphasis program management...,'" Joiner said.

Ensuring a discrimination-free environment is important to her, and feels that pursuing that goal will facilitate organizational success.

"I would like to welcome everyone to visit the EEO office at anytime," Joiner said. "I'm dedicated to the mission of the organization and the due care of the workforce."

Joiner has one daughter, Richlan Paige, who is age six. Because they have never visited Kansas City before, Joiner and her daughter are looking forward to discovering all the city's major attractions. Joiner's hobbies include reading and writing.

The Power

Greg Wilson, real estate chief in Kansas City, returned to his hometown to assist in the cleanup of Hurricane Katrina



Photo by Jennie Wilson

Greg Wilson, real estate chief for Kansas City, had multiple reasons for volunteering to help aid victims of Hurricane Katrina along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, chief among them was that it was home.

“I was born in Greenville,” Wilson said. “I grew up here.”

Greenville, in the northwestern part of the state, received little or no storm damage, but at least one of his relatives was a victim of the storm.

“One of my nephews lost his belongings that were in an apartment,” Wilson said.

Still, coming back to Mississippi was coming home. The homecoming wasn’t without difficulties, as Wilson pursued the mission of being real estate chief for Katrina/Mississippi.

Arriving Sept. 25, slightly less than a month after the storm, Wilson’s first task consisted of meeting community leaders and seeing the miles of devastation left in the wake of the Category 4 hurricane.

“Grasping the severity of the damage was hard,” said Wilson. “Another hard part has been working with the counties and cities on debris removal from private property.”

USACE projects between 40 and 50 million cubic yards of debris in the Mississippi counties in the wake of the hurricane – 7 million in Hancock County alone. Much of that debris rested on private property.

To comply with local laws and Federal Emergency Management Agency guidelines, homeowners who wanted debris removed had to fill out a “right-of-

entry” form, to allow Corps contractors to enter their property.

“We were asked by the Hancock and Jackson counties to help man the ROE stations. We had to put people in place for that, get a contractor on board, and begin writing ROEs for private properties. We also had to get a memoranda of understanding between us and the local governments,” Wilson said.

Six weeks after the storm, the ROE process had begun, and the removal of debris from private property was being planned.

Another key portion of Wilson’s job was to acquire office space for the numerous USACE mission in Mississippi, including support of the Blue Roof program, which provided temporary repairs to people’s storm-damaged rooftops, debris removal, and the construction of temporary public structures for city and county governments and schools.

Wilson, who had just returned from his second tour in Iraq, supporting reconstruction efforts there, was able to quickly jump into the emergency recovery mode.

“It’s been good to be back home, and to be part of an excellent team down here,” Wilson said. “It’s been extremely rewarding, you’re able to help people.”

He thanked Barbara Cunningham and Kurt Mueller who provided valuable back-fill for him during his absence, which he plans to extend through the end of November.

“They’ve done an excellent job,” he said.

of ONE



Joe Lopez (left), a natural resources specialist assigned to Perry Lake, consults with a heavy equipment operator performing debris removal in Bay Saint Louis, Miss

Story/photos by Eric Cramer



It's a hard figure to comprehend, 22.5 million cubic yards. That's the total amount of Hurricane Katrina debris the Federal Emergency Management Agency has tasked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove from the lower 14 counties of Mississippi.

It amounts to 225 football fields, each buried in debris 50 feet deep.

Joe Lopez, when at home a natural resources specialist and park ranger at Perry Lake, is making certain his portion of that mission is done the right way.

Lopez volunteered to perform quality assurance on the debris removal mission in Hancock County, where the Corps estimates there is 7 million cubic yards of debris. Lopez supervises 19 quality assurance workers, who make certain contractors load their trucks safely and issue tickets to contractors enumerating the number of cubic yards of debris loaded onto the trucks.

The Corps is supervising literally hundreds of subcontractors working for AshBritt Environmental, a

Florida-based company that is the prime contractor for debris removal. Lopez and other volunteers work where the rubber meets the road in that process.

"It's our job to see to it their activities meet Corps and FEMA safety and performance guidelines," Lopez said. "We make certain everything is done up to standards."

Lopez's work area is Bay Saint Louis, formerly a pleasant coastal community, home to about 8,200 people, and now largely a blasted wasteland of destroyed homes and businesses.

Lopez came to Mississippi just three weeks after Hurricane Katrina came ashore Aug. 29, pushing a 30-foot-deep "storm surge" ahead of itself. The storm devastated New Orleans. Less publicized, but equally damaged, is Mississippi's gulf coast from Waveland to Biloxi.

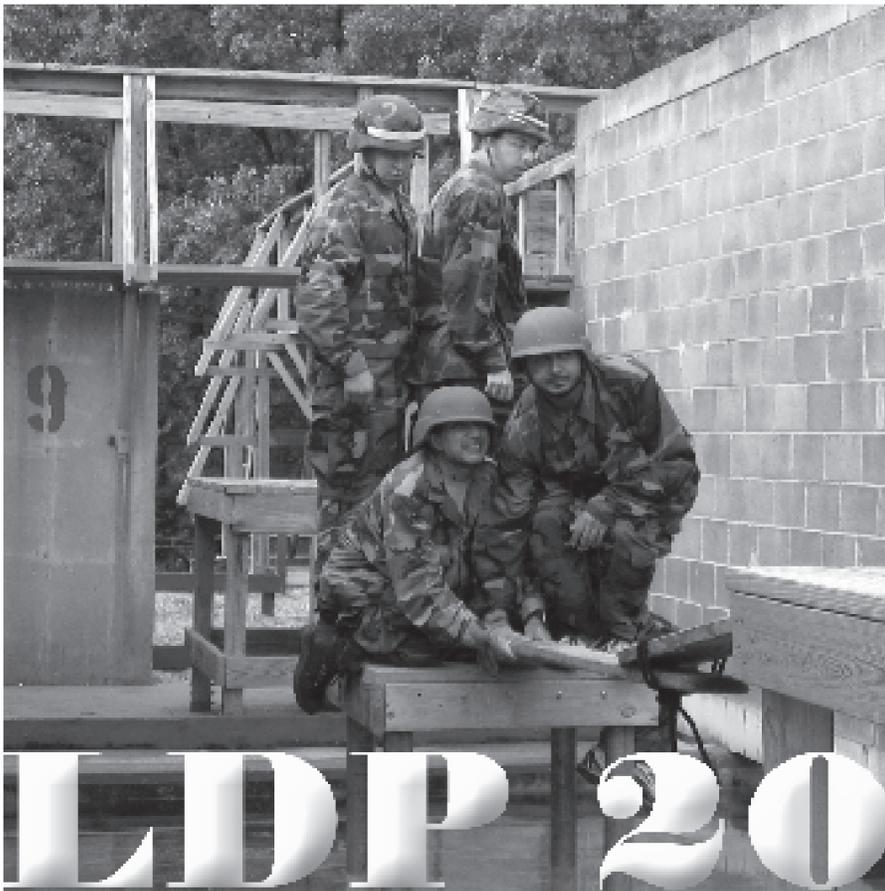
"Initially, I volunteered for 30 days, but I've extended for a second 30 days," Lopez said. "When I first got here, they took me on a tour of Bay Saint Louis and Waveland, and I saw the destruction. You see lots with the roofs of two or three homes on them, trees broken like toothpicks. I didn't expect this. I lived through a couple of hurricanes during my youth in Texas, but I'd never seen anything like this."

Lopez is working 12-hour days, seven days a week, during his deployment, with little time to stop during the workday. During a break, his phone rings – a contractor wants to know if he can "pre-load" his truck, delivering this afternoon's load early tomorrow morning, and increasing the number of trips he can perform the next day.

"No, he's got plenty of time to get to the dump site today," Lopez says. "Tell him to get on out there."

He said the job has gotten easier as contractors have begun to grasp the scope of the debris removal mission.

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Robyn Kiefer, Jill Fraley and Christine Ostrander (left to right) examine an obstacle course. Each course had a time limit of 30 minutes.



LDP 2006

Today's Challenges, Tomorrow's Leaders

Craig Litteken, David Nelson, Saqib Khan and Shahir Safi (listed back to front, left to right), attempt to complete the obstacle without falling into the three feet of water below.

Jill Fraley prepares to engage the Military Operations in an Urban Terrain Course. The course resembled an Iraqi house filled with insurgents.



The LDP Class of 2006 pause for a brief moment. The class is comprised of employees throughout the Kansas City District.

Story provided by Allison Choike, staff writer for Guidon, Fort Leavenworth. Used with permission.

LDP 2006 Class Roster

Jonathan Carlisle, Jill Fraley, Willem Helms, Christine Hendzlik, David Hibbs, Saquib Khan, Robyn Kiefer, Craig Litteken, Charles Nelson, Christine Ostrander, Shahir Safi, Eric Shumate, Bryan Smith, Shelly Thomas, Karen Turner and David White.

A group of 16 up and coming civilian leaders who work for the Corps of Engineers in the Kansas City District were about to embark on their Leader Development Program mission. In the past the program participants have attended conferences and meetings at various hotels and conference centers, but this year they received a different type of Army training.

They arrived at Fort Leonard Wood to go through the post's Leadership Reaction Course and gain experience of what Soldiers do in the Army.

Among the group were engineers, environmentalists, contractors, supervisors, quality control specialists and park rangers.

District Engineer Col. Mike Rossi came up with the idea to "rough" things up this year and to bring the group to Fort Leonard Wood.

"Fort Leonard Wood is one of our big customers for the Corps of Engineers, we do all the military construction, so I thought it would be a good opportunity for them to come in and meet the customer."

At 1 p.m., the mix of people took on the LRC. Within the course there are a series of obstacles that require teamwork, planning and leadership from each of the individuals.

The first obstacle was to build a type of makeshift bridge across concrete pillars. Team members were given different sizes of plywood and two ammunition

boxes. In thirty minutes, they were required to get across the 3 feet of water with all the supplies and ammo.

With drill sergeants and other Army personnel on hand to guide them, the group worked together and completed the task at hand.

Even though the mission was a success, one of the members did get a little wet after losing his balance.

David White, Kansas City Corps of Engineers, was expecting an event like this, but not the location. He said overall this was a "great experience."

All involved were issued a set of battle dress uniform and Kevlar helmets. It was not hard to see each playing the role and trying to gain an experience many of the Soldiers on Fort Leonard Wood complete.

Other obstacles that the group participated in were; taking two empty barrels and making a boat to cross a water obstacle along with the ammo issued, and, taking rope to make a type of platform with plywood to get from one side of the water pit to the other.

The group completed four of the obstacles in the Leadership reaction course. During basic training, Soldiers complete a series of ten.

"This is a group of our up and coming leaders and they volunteered for this year long program. Most of our training is academic and this is the first thing they do in that yearlong trip together. It is a type of storming and norming thing for them," said Rossi.

The group will graduate from the program in August of 2006. This event was the first of the challenges they will face.

"I want to commend this team for having a great attitude about the 'no-notice' challenge we gave them," said Rossi. "They are going to be an absolutely great team."



ment.
out



Photo Provided

“Our day at Fort Leonard Wood was a good opportunity for people in the class to step up to the plate and test their leadership potential. I would definitely recommend the course to other District personnel.” --*Robyn Kiefer, project manager*



Photo by Benny Alvarez

“I can say with certainty for all of us this trip turned out to be one of the most wonderful experiences. I thoroughly enjoyed it.” --*Saqib Khan, project manager*



Photo Provided

“By taking part in the LDP, I had... situations and people involved... to our customers.” --*David White*



“I decided to participate in the LDP to become a better leader. Even though it was a challenging day, it was a lot of fun.” --*Karen Turner, program analyst*





Photo by Benny Alvarez

“The Fort Leonard Wood retreat was an experience I’ll never forget. With that as our start, I can’t help but be excited about the rest of the year.” --*David Nelson, project manager*

hope to better my ability to deal with problems, with the Corps and to provide a better product site, natural resource management specialist



Photo by Benny Alvarez



Photo by Benny Alvarez

“You quickly learn how to work together when four adults are tasked to balance on a elevated 3’ x 3’ concrete square pier and shimmy a board between your legs to get to the next pier, realizing that there is 3’ of water waiting to greet you if you should fall.”--*Bryan Smith, project manager*

GL



Photos courtesy John Schreiner



BAL

Repositioning

If you build it, they will come...

Just as the mysterious voice from the tiny cornfield in Iowa urged Kevin Costner to build his baseball field in the popular movie "Field of Dreams," so is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers building throughout the Kansas City District in anticipation of the thousands of Soldiers who are already on their way.

Construction is dotting the district map at military installations such as Fort Riley and McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, and Fort Leonard Wood and Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. This workload is expected to significantly affect the district.

"The district will have more than \$200 million added to the 2006 budget over last year," said Bill Waugh, chief of Military Programs.

The military program budget was \$290.1 million in 2005.

He explained with the construction growth occurring everywhere due to modularity, global repositioning and the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the district could be affected for the next five years (the length of the BRAC legislation).

"They call it the 'Perfect Storm' because the terms are all different but related," said Col. Michael Rossi, district engineer. "Modularity has to do with the way Army units are structured, and if structures change, the result is people get moved somewhere else. With BRAC, if they close one base, they have to take those people and move them to another base, and it's the same thing with Global Repositioning."

New Personnel

"One thing we do know is we've got more work coming, and we're not getting substantially bigger," Rossi said. "Something's gotta give."

During the Town Hall in October, Rossi briefly mentioned part of his strategy, introducing his "80 by 180" initiative.

"We want to get the right people on the bus," Rossi

said, "and our goal is to hire 80 new people by the 180th day of the year. Although we will add staff, we can't solve the challenge by just adding more people."

Rossi explained with the extra work and virtually the same number of personnel to accomplish the mission, the District's current processes would have to change.

"We have to be more efficient, and we have to be faster in order to handle the workload," Rossi said.

Regionalization

Rossi mentioned the district is looking at making the acquisition strategies more regional as part of the solution and suggested the district join its counterparts by sharing its workload.

"We might have to cross traditional boundaries by sharing design and



Story by Diana McCoy

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THE POWER OF ONE

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“The contractors are starting to see the bigger picture now,” Lopez said. “They’re doing a better job of cleaning the sites and really trying to do a good job.”

He encourages people to volunteer for the ongoing hurricane recovering effort, which is expected to last for eight months to a year.

“It’s a good thing to do, if you have support from your supervisors back home,” he said. “And you can say you had a part in the recovery.”

GLOBAL REPOSITIONING

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procurements,” Rossi stated. “Such workload sharing is not unprecedented. We have great folks in Kansas City, and other districts give us their design work,” he said. “For instance, we do design in New York and New Jersey, but that district handles all the construction.”

Another part of the possible solution Rossi mentioned was grouping projects together and doing more design-build.

Prioritization

The third part of the district’s strategy is focused on prioritization.

“The military always has more requirements than they have money to fulfill them,” Rossi said. “The first step is to set priorities, but once they’re set we have uncertainties. Where does the money go? Do we put the money into permanent barracks or temporary ones?”

An example is the construction taking place at Fort Riley, which is expected to double in size, going from 10,000 Soldiers at present to 20,000 by 2011.

“We’re renovating some of the existing barracks which are left over from the World War II era,” Waugh said. “We’re also

constructing re-locatable buildings which should be completed by January.”

The re-locatable buildings will support those Soldiers already arriving while permanent barracks are in the process of being renovated.

Timing will also have a large affect on the district. Because priorities continually change and the date the last Soldier arrives is unknown, long term funding for the program is still uncertain.

While the Kansas City District is not left wondering what they need to build in preparation for an unknown person, they are sure to follow in Costner’s shoes and fulfill the mysterious voice’s second request to *go the distance*.



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TAKE IT TO HEART

Letters to the Heartland Engineer

Letter: _____

“NSPS is on the horizon and aside from a mention in the last Town Hall, there is not a whole lot of information out there. What are the District plans to educate the workforce on this change which will impact almost all of us in the District?” - Jennie Wilson, IM

Response: _____

“A delay in the formal announcement of the NSPS system has caused a similar delay in the District plan to rollout the training, implementation and awareness efforts of the NSPS system. Currently there is a transition team within the District working on the NSPS effort. Look for detailed NSPS coverage in the HEARTLAND ENGINEER starting in January 2006 as well as District announcements on the intranet bulletin board. Federal employees can also visit the NSPS web site at <http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/>”

In an effort to promote two-way communication, the Heartland Engineer wants to hear from you. If you have a question on a district policy, event, or issue, a comment on a feature or article covered in Heartland Engineer, a suggestion, or simply want to give your own ‘two cents’, please send them to thomas.a.o'hara@usace.army.mil. Submissions subject to editing and not all are guaranteed to be printed. **TAKE IT TO HEART.**



The POWER of saying “hello”

Sitting in a bar eating dinner after the third night of procrastinating on actually going out and buying groceries, I found myself shoulder-to-shoulder with a total stranger. He looked tired, frustrated and a little anxious. The waitresses were making a big ‘to-do’ signing a shirt for him to take home. It would have been easy to stay busy with my newspaper, beer, buffalo wings and watch the pounding West Virginia was giving Connecticut on ESPN, but I figure I’d say “hello”.

Hello.

Turned out the stranger to my left was named Chris and he is a transplanted New Orleans hurricane survivor. It took little time to get Chris talking about his frustration of the superficial coverage of him and his fellow Louisiana citizen’s plight following Hurricane Katrina and Rita. After explaining my familiarity as part of the Corps and its role with FEMA, we quickly found common ground and had a platform to talk for the evening.

Chris was on the verge of returning permanently to the devastated area to begin rebuilding his home, his neighborhood, and his life. He had returned to New Orleans for brief visits in the last few weeks, but this evening would be the last spent as an evacuee resident in a strange city. Everything I thought I knew about the situation from the cartoon networks we call national news and the well-staffed talking points provided within our own organization paled to the raw, genuine account told by a living, breathing organ directly connected to the severed artery that is the devastation in New Orleans. It was an eye-opening dialogue.

Somewhere history will record the trial of the political failures. Somewhere the debate of who did or didn’t do what fast enough will subside. At some point the focus will return to Chris’ story: a proud father, a man, who is ready to quit pointing fingers and start building again. The local citizens know where the ball was dropped and many don’t care at this point. They want to get back to normal.

Normalcy. Sense of home. It’s a human need. It’s who we all are.

As a member of an organization that has been included in part of the blame game for more than a month, it was great to have a customer, a taxpayer, a human, state they saw through the fog of political correctness and superficial analysis and appreciated the selfless sacrifice of heroes from around the nation who packed their bags and joined the fight to recover New Orleans and the surrounding area.

Chris mentioned he had worked with the FEMA personnel, the Corps volunteers and appreciated their support. He’s thanked the National Guard troops who have deployed to his hometown and shook hands with the Corps folks who provided his ‘blue roof’ following the first storm. A visit with Chris allowed me to see the humanity that doesn’t make the headlines.

After an evening of genuine common ground, and after a round on me before he returned to the ground zero of national disasters, I found myself thankful for not just watching another tired Thursday night football game and hiding myself in the paper. In fact, I threw that paper away. After talking with my new friend, I already learned the news of the day.

After all the years of outreach training, public affairs interaction and press releases, I learned something new: There is power in just saying “hello”.

Try it sometime.



**Jennie Wilson, NWK
visual information
specialist, celebrates
Halloween as a spirited
USACE employee.
(CENWK-PA photo)**

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