



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
St. Paul District

Crosscurrents

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July-August 2008

District teams win
three environmental
awards, Page 4

District deploys personnel to flood fight in Iowa

The St. Paul District provided personnel, technical expertise and supplies in response to record flooding in parts of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Missouri in June. The district supported the Corps' Rock Island District, which had the flood response mission for most of Iowa.

A total of 235,000 sandbags had been distributed for disaster response in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin by mid-June. Also, the district provided technical assistance to three counties in Wisconsin.

The district initially deployed five personnel to the flood fight in Iowa. More personnel subsequently deployed and returned as the flood fight evolved into a recovery mission.
More, Page 7.



Command Corner
by Col. Jon Christensen
St. Paul District Commander



Photo by Jeff DeZellar

Dave Valen, design branch, Dick Otto, natural resources office, LaCrescent, Minn., and Tim Meers, Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam, Minneapolis, work emergency support function 3, public works and engineering, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, early in July.



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
St. Paul District

Crosscurrents

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Teammates,

As you are well aware, the St. Paul District has a tradition of lending support and being ready when disaster strikes. This custom continued this past summer in response to the recent record floods in the Midwest, when record-breaking storms and flooding occurred across six states. During the crisis, record flood stages were set at more than 47 gauge stations on more than 12 tributary rivers and creeks in the Upper and Middle Mississippi River Basins.

Within the Rock Island and St. Louis Districts, 25 levees (19 non-federal and six federal) were overtopped and navigation was closed temporarily when flood waters overtopped Locks and Dams 12 through 25. St. Paul personnel quickly volunteered to assist our fellow districts and worked closely with local residents and local, state and federal agencies to help battle the flood and to clean up in the aftermath.

The district supported the effort by deploying technical experts, public affairs augmentees, housing teams and others, along with more than 222,000 sandbags, some 600 rolls of polyethylene sheeting and six pumps. Our fellow districts were very appreciative of the support and I was proud to see so many folks from the district step forward to help.

The work and support continues. Our critical public facilities team, or CPF, working closely with Rock Island personnel, has done a remarkable job in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where the recent floods reached 11 feet above the previous flood of record set in 1851.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency tasked the Corps of Engineers with constructing a complex of 35 modular buildings that will serve as administrative office space for the Cedar Rapids Community School District. The Rock Island and St. Paul CPF team performed superbly, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled within the next week. On a separate note, lessons learned from our Grand Forks project are being shared with the Cedar Rapids city officials so they can better formulate a successful plan for their future.

Finally, our own Lt. Col. Kunkle has volunteered to head the Interagency Levee Task Force for the 2008 Midwest Floods. This task force has the stated purpose to conduct a regionally coordinated assessment of flood risk management systems in the areas affected by the 2008 flood.

This task force will offer an opportunity for all participating agencies to address a rapid and effective response to damaged flood and floodplain management systems to minimize future risk to life and property, while ensuring an effective interagency approach to flood-damage mitigation and floodplain management, including opportunities for non-structural alternatives, in a collaborative manner. I predict great things emanating from this task force, with lasting benefits to the region.

Again, I want to thank all those who stepped up to deploy in support of others and those back in the district who picked up the extra duties left behind. Your efforts clearly made, and are continuing to make, a difference to those who were affected by this record event.

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Photo by Tammy Wick



Photo by Peter Versteegen

At left, Jane Groth, Lock and Dam 6, prepares to host the Meet and Greet sponsored by the Special Emphasis Program Committee in Fountain City, Wis., July 28. Above, newcomers Jerry Stalder, locks and dams program manager, and Lynnette Gandl, environmental protection specialist, boarded the Taggatz as part of the Meet and Greet. More on Pages 11-12.



St. Paul District file photo

The water-level management for ecosystem restoration on the Upper Mississippi River system in Minnesota and Wisconsin, otherwise known as the Pool 5 drawdown, demonstrated improved growth of aquatic vegetation and restored degraded habitat.

Panel of judges honors district teams with three environmental awards

by Shannon Bauer

The St. Paul District received two Chief of Engineers Environmental Honor Awards and the Environmental Design Team of the Year award in the 2008 Chief of Engineers Design and Environmental Awards Program hosted biannually by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The Corps' headquarters established this award program in 1965 to recognize and promote

excellence in design and environmental achievement by its engineers and professional contractors.

This year, the mostly non-Corps judges received 25 entries in the environmental category, six of which were selected for awards. The district received three of the six.

The district's Grand Forks, N.D./East Grand Forks, Minn., Flood Damage Reduction Project and its Greenway received one of the environmental honor awards. The

project includes an unobstructed 2,200 acre floodway and other state-of-the-art flood abatement measures. As a result of the project's Greenway, citizens benefit from an environmentally friendly recreational area that boasts 20 miles of paved multi-use trail, eight trailheads and 33 access points, all of which are handicap-accessible.

A recent report by American Rivers cites the Grand Forks/East Grand Forks project as a case

Awards, continued Page 5

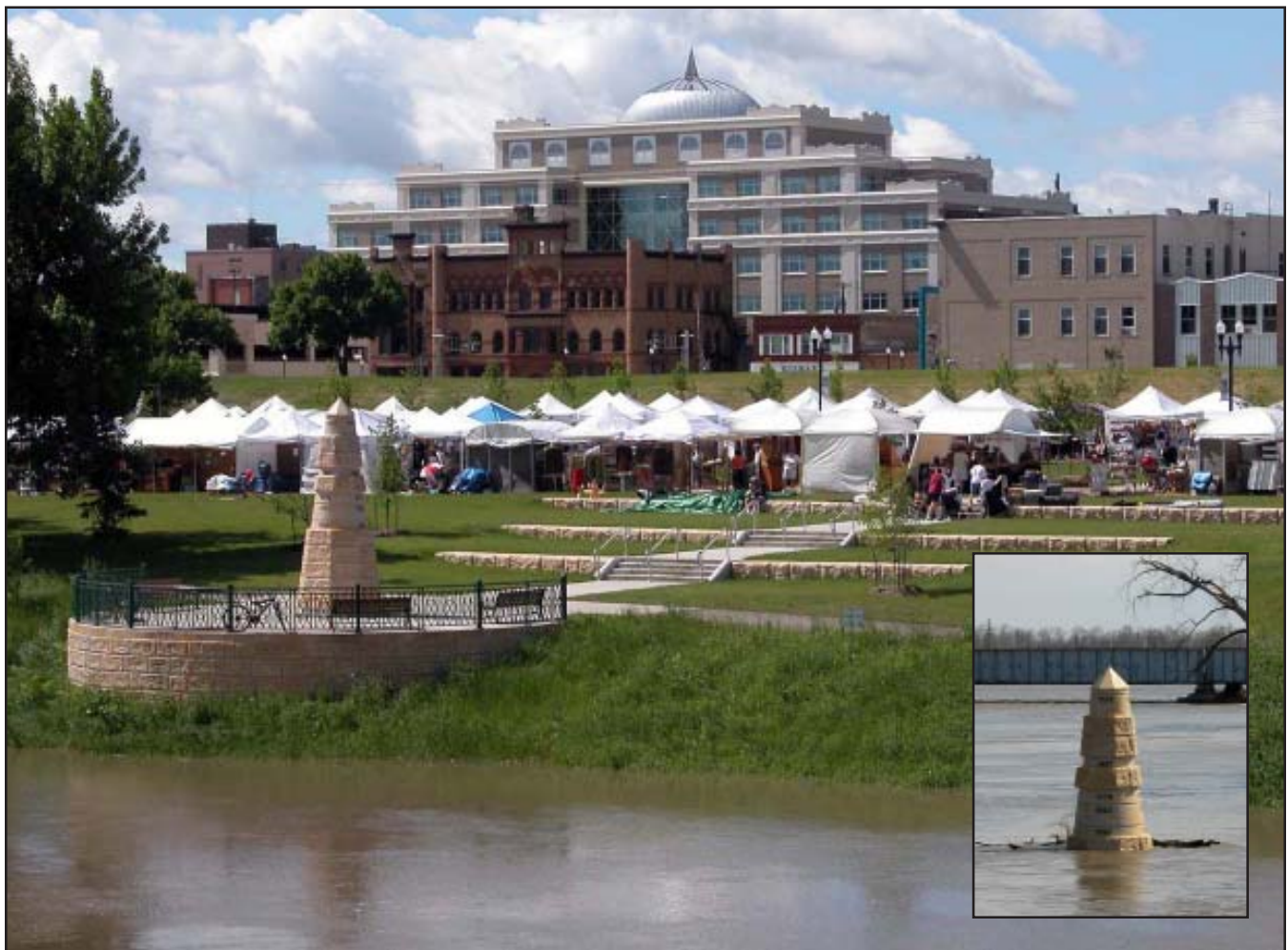
Awards, continued from Page 4 study in how natural flood protection can work. “These communities have reduced or eliminated flood disasters while preserving the environment for present and future generations,” the report concludes. “They are now safer, healthier and more livable.”

The district’s Water Level Management for Ecosystem

Restoration Pool 5, Upper Mississippi River project received the other environmental honor award, as well as the Environmental Design Team of the Year award. This project used dredging and drawdowns to mimic a natural environment in Pool 5 of the Mississippi River and resulted in extensive aquatic vegetative growth on 2,000 acres. The vigorous vegetation response

resulted, in turn, in increased populations of shorebirds, water fowl and other wildlife, which has increased opportunities for hunting, fishing and bird watching.

“The drawdowns worked,” according to a story published Oct. 12, 2007, in the Rochester *Post-Bulletin*. “The emergent plants responded well and so did the submerged plants, including water celery.”



St. Paul district file photos

The Greenway provides Grand Forks, N.D., and East Grand Forks, Minn., green space for events such as the Grand Cities Art Fest. The space also acts as floodway. Inset: the high water surrounding the obelisk during 2006 spring flooding demonstrates the flood damage reduction function. The top portion marks the flood of 1997. Stanley Consultants, Muscatine, Iowa; HDR Engineering, Minneapolis; Short Elliott Henrickson, St. Paul, Minn.; and Ayres Associates, Eau, Claire, Wis., contributed to the project design.

Design and environmental awards recognize and promote excellence in design

The Chief of Engineers Design and Environmental Awards Program was created in 1965 to recognize and promote excellence in design achievement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its professional partners. In its 43-year history, the program has presented a total of 494 awards in the 31 times it has been judged. The program presents four types of awards:

The Chief of Engineers Award of Excellence is the highest award. Only one award may be given for an entry in each of the two primary categories. This award requires the unanimous decision of the jury for an entry that truly exhibits excellence in all major professional design disciplines. The jury is not obligated to nominate any entry for this award.

Honor Awards are given in both primary categories to entries that demonstrate or stimulate excellence in each of the design disciplines. The jury determines the number of awards. An honor award is given to an entry based on majority decision of the jury with no juror casting a dissenting vote.

Merit Awards are given for projects that may be related to individual disciplines. The jury determines the number and types of merit awards.

Design Team of the Year Award is awarded to the design team of the in-house designated project that achieves the highest-level award in the Chief of Engineers Design and Environmental Awards Program. In the event that more than one in-house designed project receives the same level award, multiple awards will be given.

Grand Forks/East Grand Forks Honor Award team members

Steven Adamski, office of counsel;
John Albrecht, real estate;
Christopher Behling, design branch;
Ralph Berger, design branch;
Jay Bushy, Western Area Office, Grand Forks, N.D.;
Richard Carlson, project management;
Michael Evenson, Western Area Office;
Tony Fares, design branch;
Richard Femrite, design branch;
John Fisher, design branch;
Virginia Gnabasik, project management;
Carl Gray, design branch;
Bonnie Greenleaf, project management;
Timothy Grundhoffer, design branch;
Lowell Hanson, resident office, Devils Lake, N.D.;
Rick Hauck, hydraulics and hydrology;
Kent Hokens, design branch;

William Hurley, contracting;
Craig Johnson, Western Area Office;
Noeun Kol, design branch;
Mark Krenelka, Western Area Office;
Jan Lassen, design branch;
Michael Lesher, hydraulics and hydrology;
Dawn Linder, contracting;
Judith Marshall, project management;
Byron Nelson, design branch;
Michael Nelson, Western Area Office;
Timothy Paulus, design branch;
Virginia Regorrah, Western Area Office;
Grant Riddick, design branch;
James Sentz, design branch;
John Shyne, project management;
Kevin Sommerland, real estate;
Patrick Trudel, Grand Forks Resident Office;
James Ulrick, design branch.

Design Team of the Year

St. Paul District:
Scott Bratten, hydraulics and hydrology;
Jeff DeZellar, project management;
Jon Hendrickson, hydraulics and hydrology;
Scott Jutila, hydraulics and hydrology;
Dan Kelner, project management;
Paul Machajewski, channels and harbors;
Brad Perkl, project management;
Dan Wilcox, project management.

Federal and state agency partners:
Tim Schlagenhaft, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources;
Mark Andersen, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources;
Gretchen Benjamin, WDNR
Mary Stefanski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Disaster response reveals the good, the bad and the ugly

Commentary by Jeff DeZellar

Jeff DeZellar, project management, worked as a public affairs augmentee as part of the response to record-setting floods in Iowa this summer.

Torrential rains in the Midwest resulted in intense flooding over southern Minnesota, much of Iowa, parts of Illinois and Missouri in mid-June 2008.

In many locations, flood records exceeded those established nearly

a century ago. For example, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the Cedar River crested on June 13 at a level 12 feet above the previous record flood in 1929. As the flood waters receded, the widespread devastation caused by the flooding became painfully apparent.

The Iowa Flood of 2008 immediately triggered a disaster response and recovery effort at all levels of government.

In accordance with established response protocols, the Federal Emergency Management Agency led the overall federal disaster

response for this event.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers mobilized at the request of FEMA. The Corps' regional flood response and recovery effort in Iowa is managed by Rock Island District, supported by numerous other Corps' districts, including St. Paul.

When disaster strikes, persons affected by the disaster, or deployed to the scene for response or recovery efforts, have a wide and varied range of experiences and emotions. Call it the good, the

Floods, continued Page 8



Photo by Jim Mosner

From left, Steve Lenhart, upper area lockmaster, St. Paul District; Pat Vickman, a civil engineer at the Winona Resident Office, Winona, Minn., and Ken Ayres, Rock Island District, discuss a critical public facilities project for the Cedar Rapids School District at the Kingston Stadium site, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Lenhart is a quality assurance inspector on the project, Vickman is the resident engineer, and Ayers was a visitor to the project.

Floods, continued from Page 7

bad and the ugly of disaster response. For several St. Paul District employees deployed to Iowa, these experiences have had a significant impact.

Deployed between June 16 and June 29, district deployees experienced long hours, frequent challenges and often stressful working conditions, but also found the work exciting and rewarding.

The Ugly

The first sights of the damage caused by the flooding stunned experienced disaster response personnel. Dick Otto, mission manager, observed people carrying debris out of their houses, which used to be their personal possessions. Tim Meers, site engineer, said, "I saw people with dust masks, looking at their personal belongings, which was now debris, caked with mud, piled in front of their homes."

Capt. Adam Rasmussen saw a line of scum halfway up the windows of houses. Dave Valen, electrical engineer, said, "I saw a flooded church, and it bothered me." Dennis Anderson, environmental compliance officer, saw piles of appliances and sheet rock stacked on the sidewalk in front of houses. As a public affairs augmentee, I saw a railroad bridge over the Cedar River twisted like a pretzel, a testament to the force of the flood waters.

The Bad

Certainly the most sobering aspect of an event like this is the crushing devastation to the lives of those directly affected. Otto said of the flood victims "There was desperation on their faces, as they



Photo by Jeff DeZellar

Lt. Col. Kunkle, St. Paul district deputy commander, filled in as acting Rock Island district deputy commander during the flood of 2008. He worked assignments at the Iowa State emergency operations center/joint field office headquarters in Des Moines as the Rock Island District Emergency Operations Center-Forward, June 12-22. He moved to the emergency field office in Cedar Rapids, June 23 to July 8.

realized that it will take years to recover from this random act of nature." Otto said he saw a grandmother and her grandchild sitting on the street curb, homeless.

Anderson said, "People seemed in a state of shock." He noted the damage to historic buildings in the floodplain.

A number of the deployed personnel noted that much of the worst damage in Cedar Rapids seemed to be in lower income areas, which increases the feelings of sadness.

The Good

In the face of this human and structural devastation, the goodness in human nature emerged. Said Otto, "It is not about the Corps or FEMA being the savior. It's about the people."

Valen said, "It feels good to be helping. We are providing temporary housing for people while they rebuild."

Meers said, "Helping people is the reason I came down here."

Said Anderson, "The Iowa folks have been pleasant and understanding. I also felt good about the camaraderie among the workers, from many agencies and companies, and from all levels of government. This sentiment was shared by all."

Many of the responders have done this type of work for numerous disasters, in many places, and all say they are motivated by being able to play some small part in helping the people and the communities recover and return to normal.

Awards picnic starts in rain, ends in sun

by Peter Verstegen

The Eau Galle Recreation Area in Spring Valley, Wis., hosted between 80-100 personnel from the St. Paul District for the 2008 Summer Awards Ceremony, June 12.

The awards committee, co-chaired by Ryan Price and John Murphy, organized games, including golf, softball and volleyball, bocce ball and children’s activities. The committee, working with public affairs, asked participants to donate a nonperishable item for a St. Paul-based neighborhood food shelf.

District Commander Jon Christensen presented a Commanders Award for Civilian Service to Ed Eaton, engineering and construction; an Achievement Medal for Civilian Service to Bill Vennemann, real estate; length of service awards to 27 district personnel representing 590 years of service; certificates of appreciation to Bonnie Greenleaf, project management, and Ray Nelson, Crosslake. Daniel Boone received recognition with an Afghanistan flag for his work in the Afghanistan Engineer District.

More than 120 had purchased tickets. Rain throughout the morning dampened turnout. The event opened with rain but ended with sunshine.

Larry Joachim, a retiree from real estate division, catered the awards picnic, June 19. His granddaughter, Cheyenne Joachim, is at right.



Photo by Jon Lyman

Kevin Bluhm, project management, set up the sound system.



Photo by Peter Verstegen

Pa Xiong, a student in regulatory branch, attended her first awards picnic. Behind and to the right is John Dittrich, information technology specialist, ACE-IT, the Corps’ information technology provider.



Photo by Peter Verstegen



Photo by Peter Verstegen

Kari Layman, engineering, and Corrine Hodapp, Eau Galle Recreation Area park manager, Spring Valley, Wis., stood through a drenching rain to welcome district personnel.



Photo by Jon Lyman

Jon Peterson, Kari Layman, Chris Erickson, Jodi Kormanik, Jane Flewellen and Chris Afdahl unfurled the Minneapolis-St. Paul Society of American Military Engineers banner in recognition for hosting the national SAME conference in Minneapolis, May 20-23, 2008. Erickson works in project management, the rest in engineering and construction.



Photo by Jon Lyman

Ten individuals received their 20-year awards: Matt Bray, engineering, Bonnie Greenleaf, project management; Josh Cress, engineering; Otis Jacobson, Lock and Dam 6; Andy Diep, information technology; Keith LeClaire, project management; John Fisher, engineering; Girard Schuster, engineering; Denise Julson, locks and dams project office; and Terry Zien, project management.

Quarters Boat Taggatz completes fleet

The Quarters Boat Taggatz arrived at its home base in Fountain City, Wis., for the first time July 28. Its arrival completes the St. Paul District dredging fleet. The new fleet consists of the Taggatz, the Dredge Goetz and the Motor Vessel General Warren. The fleet replaces the Dredge Thompson for maintaining the nine-foot channel and navigation on the Upper Mississippi River and tributaries.

About 25 newcomers (right), in Fountain City for the Special Emphasis Program Committee welcoming ceremony, were the first to tour the boat at its home port.



Photo by Peter Verstegen



Photo by Tammy Wick

Jim Maybach, plant engineer, escorted newcomers aboard the Quarters Boat Taggatz when it arrived in Fountain City July 28.



Photo by Peter Verstegen

The Quarters Boat Taggatz is one of three vessels that make up the new dredging fleet at the St. Paul District. The vessel is named after Harold Taggatz, a St. Paul District assistant chief of the old Construction-Operations Division. The boat is 160 feet long and 40 feet wide and has staterooms, a lounge, laundry and kitchen for the crew.

News and Notes



Photo by Peter Versteegen

Twenty-four newcomers gathered at the service base in Fountain City, Wis., for the Meet and Greet program on July 28. The event was sponsored by the Special Emphasis Program Committee–race ethnicity subcommittee.

Announcements

Heritage Toastmasters held its annual elections in June. **Nan Bischoff**, project manager, was elected president. **Jim Sentz**, engineering, was elected vice president of education. **Rick Carlson**, economist, was elected vice president of membership. **Shannon Bauer**, public affairs, was elected vice president of public relations. **Stephanie Dupey**, project management, was elected treasurer. **Tim Paulus**, project management and outgoing president, was elected secretary. **Terry Zien**, project management, was elected sergeant-at-arms. Heritage Toastmasters meets Tuesdays, in Room 5A, from noon-1 p.m. For more information, contact Bischoff at 651-290-5426.

Lock and Dam 3, located just north of Red Wing, Minn., received a 50-year weather observation

award from the National Weather Service in May.

Kevin Sommerland, was selected as real estate's chief of acquisition and management branch, effective June 22.

The **St. Paul District** donated 80 pounds of food and \$110 to the Keystone Community Services Food Shelf at the annual Summer Awards Ceremony in June.

Ben Wopat, retired deputy chief of the old construction-operations division, is the 2008 Hall of Fame recipient. He will be recognized at the Retirees' Reunion held at the City View/Lost Spur Banquet and Conference Center, 2750 Sibley Memorial Highway (Highway 13), Eagan, Minn., Sept. 11, 2008.

Newcomers

Brian Alberto, student, hydraulics and hydrology
Abdul Ali, Lac Qui Parle

Chad Anderson, student, Lock and Dam 6

Lyle Begay, engineering

Justin Bernau, Lock and Dam 8

Dawn Brabbit, student, Lock and Dam 6

Robert Brockway, Lock and Dam 10

Chad Ernst, student, Eau Galle

Larry Fisher, Lock and Dam 2

Steve Grote, student, Lock and Dam 2

Dan Gudbjartsson, student, Leech Lake

Renee Hanson, student, Blackhawk Park

Patrick Harris, student, Lock and Dam 10

Joseph Hicks, Lac Qui Parle

Karen Jelcic, operations

Melissa Jenny, regulatory

Marie Kopka, regulatory

Andrey Kravets, engineering

Bradley LaBadie, Eau Galle

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News and Notes, from Page 12

Joseph Lakey, student, Lock and Dam 4

Curt Larsen, Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam

Timothy Larson, Lock and Dam 8

Daniel Lawson, student, Lock and Dam 5A

Long Le, hydraulics and hydrology

Corby Lewis, hydraulics and hydrology, again

Dale McDonough, student, Lock and Dam 10

Beau Mertens, student, Gull Lake

Buffy Moncel, contracting
Kyle Moore, maintenance and repair

Benjamin Nelson, student, Leech Lake

Mike Neumann, student, Lock and Dam 5

Peggy Noplos, student, Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam

Michael O'Keefe, regulatory, Stevens Point, Wis.

Brandon Olson, channels and harbors

Benjamin Orne, regulatory

Lean Palmquist, student, Sandy Lake

Angelo Pedretti, maintenance and repair

David Peterson, Lock and Dam 9

Lindsey Reding, student, Crosslake

Benjamin Reeser, Lock and Dam 3

James Reinarts, Lock and Dam 4

Ian Remus, student, natural resources

Mitchell Serjogins, student, Lock and Dam 9

News and Notes, continued Page 14



St. Paul District Photo

Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, then commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division, presents Aaron Snyder, project management, with a division coin for his efforts during the Interstate-35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis in August of 2007.

Corps' Headquarters honors Snyder with national public affairs award

Aaron Snyder, project management, received the Ronald J. Ruffennach Communicator of the Year Award Aug. 4 at the Corps' annual Senior Leaders Conference in Pittsburgh.

This annual award is sponsored by Corps' public affairs practitioners. Its purpose is to recognize a member of the Corps outside of the public affairs career field for his or her outstanding contributions in communicating information about Corps' missions and programs to the public.

The award recognizes

Snyder's outstanding communications practices during his routine duties at the Corps and the assistance he provided to the district's public affairs office during the collapse of the Interstate-35W Bridge near Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam in 2007.

In his role as project manager, he routinely speaks to the media and participates in public meetings, including city council meetings. He also has direct communications with the media, public, other agencies and congressional staff on issues and challenges that projects present.

News and Notes, from Page 13

Patricia Simon, contracting
Jerry Stalder, lock and dam
 project office

Jerome Stussy, Lock and Dam 9
Aaron Tappendorf, Lock and
 Dam 6

Sasha Teymorian, regulatory,
 Green Bay, Wis.

Joseph Willging, office of
 counsel.

Retirees

Ivette Garrett, office of
 counsel, effective July 31, after
 more than 14 years federal
 service.

James Hurley, Lock and Dam
 1, effective May 31, after more
 than 21 years federal service.

Dennis Krantz, Lock and Dam
 1, effective June 30, after more
 than 29 years federal service.

Robert Sikkila, Lock and Dam
 5A, effective June 28, after more
 than 30 years federal service.

Joseph Skupa, construction,
 effective May 31, after more than
 28 years federal service.

Births

Chris Botz, park ranger at Lake
 Ashtabula, celebrated the birth of a
 daughter, **Brooklyn Jane**, June
 18. Brooklyn entered the world at
 7 lbs., 4 oz.

Sue Robinson, resource
 management, celebrated the birth
 of a son, **George James**, May 17.
 George entered the world at 7 lbs.,
 12 oz.

Taps:

Ed Bankston, office of counsel
 chief who retired in 2008, passed
 away May 20.

Joan Peters, secretary who
 retired in 1976, passed away
 July 16.

**15 volunteer for Habitat for
 Humanity home construction**

Fifteen volunteers, directly or indirectly connected to the St. Paul District, volunteered to construct a home north of Minneapolis for Habitat for Humanity, April 29, May 8 and May 14.

Volunteering:

Joe Aguirre, retiree, the old construction-operations division;

Kevin Baumgard, operations;

Dave Christenson, logistics management and retired annuitant, twice;

Tom Crump, project management;

Mark Davidson, public affairs;

Sarah Denali, regulatory,

Chris Erickson, project management;

Janet Golubski, engineering and construction;

Maj. Preston Hayward, contracting, twice;

Barbara and Kymberly Koenig, daughters of Mark Koenig,
 engineering and construction;

Lt. Col. John Kunkle, deputy district engineer;

Aaron Mikonowicz, engineering and construction;

Darrell Morey, engineering and construction and rehired annuitant;

John Murphy, engineering and construction;



Photos by Mark Davidson

Maj. Preston Hayward,
 contracting division, volunteered
 twice for Habitat for Humanity.
 The Federal Executive Board
 coordinated participation.

Darrell Morey, a rehired
 annuitant in engineering and
 construction, works the upper
 level on the Habitat for
 Humanity home.



GRN

(North)

Mosul

NOI

Haditha

Al Asad

Hit

AL

Al Amarah

SOUTH

Gulf Region Division

2008

Baghdad, Iraq

Postcard from Iraq

Working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, I have experienced a lot of things that I thought I would never



Tom Anderson, left, Lock and Dam 1, Minneapolis, with Doug Plachy, a project engineer in Iraq.

do or see. I've had the opportunity to have a part in Corps' projects ranging from a reverse osmosis water purification unit, a waste water treatment plant, overhead protection improvements for buildings, sewage lift stations, lakes, pumps, canals and even to work at Saddam's Al Faw Palace, just to name a few. The time that I spent in Iraq has been very fulfilling and rewarding, definitely one of the highlights of my life. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work alongside the Iraqi people and understand their culture a little better. By the time that I finish my tour, I will have 19 months in country. I would love to come back to Iraq for another tour; but this November, I am getting married to a wonderful woman, so it might be a little tricky getting back anytime soon.

There have been a number of good things that happened to me in Iraq – from developing a new outlook on life to encountering old friends whom I haven't seen for 10 years from my Marine Corps days. The last place I thought I would have a reunion was in Iraq. One old friend was the instructor for training Soldiers on mine sweeping and safety. The other is an Army BlackHawk pilot. It was good to see they were doing well. We had a great time together just talking about what we've been doing since the last time we saw each other. I know I have started some good friendships over here that I will maintain back in the states.

I come from a Marine Corps' family. My father, sister, brother-in-law and I have all served. My family is very supportive of the choices that I've made to serve both in the Marines and here in Iraq with the Army Corps of Engineers. They are equally proud of our country and the armed forces and the job that so many are doing in rebuilding Iraq and around the world.

We pray daily for the armed forces, civilians and families and salute the sacrifices that each and every one of them has made for the freedom that we live in.

**Sincerely, Tom Anderson,
Victory Base Resident Office, Baghdad [Lock and Dam 1, Minneapolis]**