

The

# castle

Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

December 2005

*In the spirit of  
the holiday season*

**Commander and District Engineer**  
Col. Mark S. Held

**Chief of Public Affairs**  
Billy Birdwell

**Editorial Director**  
G. Jeanne Hodge

**Editor**  
Rashida Banks

**Staff Writers**  
Rashida Banks  
Tiffany Holloway

**Photographer**  
Jonas N. Jordan

**Graphics**  
Craig Janhrette

**Layout**  
Rashida Banks  
Craig Janhrette

**Authorization:** The Castle is an authorized unofficial news magazine of the Savannah District. It is published monthly in accordance with provisions of Army Regulation 360-1, under supervision of the Public Affairs Office. It is prepared on a desktop publisher and printed by offset.

**Circulation:** 1700 copies/issue.

**Submissions:** News, features, photographs and art are solicited; publication depends on general interest as judged by the editor. Direct queries to the editor: e-mail: Rashida.u.ahmed@sas02.usace.army.mil Phone (912) 652-5756; FAX (912) 652-5944. Mail submissions to the Public Affairs Office, Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 889, Savannah, Ga. 31402-0889. Content, views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Department of Army or this command. News copy is prepared in accordance with AP (Associated Press) Style Guide. All photos, unless otherwise credited, are official U.S. Army photos. For more information about the Savannah District, visit our home page at [www.sas.usace.army.mil](http://www.sas.usace.army.mil)

**FRONT COVER**

Edna Ford, Dominique Andrews, and Cameron Redmend, second and third graders from Hodge Elementary School decorate the district's Christmas tree with handmade ornaments.

Photos by Jonas Jordan.



# CONTENTS

**Near death, team member makes 'miraculous' recovery.....5**

*By Tiffany Holloway*

**New Orleans family finds a home.....7**

*By Rashida Banks*

**Deployed in Iraq during Christmas Season.....8**

*By Tiffany Holloway*

**Holidays away from home.....9**

*By Tiffany Holloway*

**Tree decorating tradition brings joy to students.....10**

*By Tiffany Holloway*

**Santa's helper gets recognition on Oprah.....11**

*By Rashida Banks*



Col. Mark S. Held, District Commander



# *Holiday Season - time for reflection, renewing relationships, celebrating traditions*

The holiday season is a time for renewing relationships, reflecting on the past and celebrating traditions. While your job here is important, do not lose track of your need to celebrate and enjoy the true meaning of the holiday season.

With such a diverse workforce, many of you will celebrate the holiday season differently. Whether it's celebrating with a new baby or new marriage, or the anticipation of retirement, the commonality of it all will be that you will celebrate with those that you truly care about and love.

Whatever your holiday traditions and beliefs are, you should take this holiday season to reflect on them and be thankful for all that you have. One of my family's traditions is to attend midnight mass on Christmas Eve. Midnight church service is a tradition that we will

continue on in my family, because traditions remind us that some things are truly lasting. This year's service will be especially meaningful for the Held family – we will celebrate it in the new Fort Benning chapel, built by the Savannah District.

Try not to get caught up in the mall shopping, packed parking lots, and all of the nuances associated with the holiday season and take time to reconnect with family and friends. When I get frustrated with the small things in my life, I try to turn it around and make it into an adventure.

Although my position here involves a lot of time and responsibility, I take advantage of my job as commander of this district. I have culminated a life time's career to get here, so I enjoy every moment of it – it's one of the blessings that I have to be thankful for this holiday season.





# Near death, team member makes 'miraculous' recovery

**By Tiffany Holloway**  
Staff Writer

Life is going on as usual on a hot summer day. Fast forward. You're lying on the ground, face in the dirt. You don't even remember why or how you got there. The worse part is that a neighbor tells you they found you lying there. You remember being at Fort Benning but that was one week ago. You have been in the hospital in a trauma unit for two weeks. Rewind. The cause of this potentially deadly occurrence: a heat stroke.

Steve Myers, an environmental specialist at Savannah District had a heat stroke on July 23. Two other guys were admitted the same day to Memorial Hospital with heat stroke, and only one survived. Myers survived the 42 days at the hospital and the two months of physical therapy.

"I don't remember anything," said Myers. "I have no idea what I was doing outside before my heatstroke."

Cathy Erickson, construction division secretary, said, "Steve doesn't remember what happened, but his neighbor, Carmella found him Saturday morning. He was taken to Memorial Hospital."

Erickson said that the heat index the week following Myers' heat stroke was 103 degrees.

Myers suffered more than just memory loss, but a loss of muscle tissue, liver and kidney failure, and had to endure a tracheotomy before the anesthesia had a chance to have an effect.

The blessings received by Myers included insurance covering most of the medical expenses, team members praying, visiting, and donating their leave time. "I don't know what I would have done without the donated leave," said Myers.

Myers said, "My family was amazed at how much team members helped."

Erickson, the unofficial point of contact, gave updates to team members on Myers' condition. "People who I normally don't

have contact with were coming up to my desk or in the hallway asking about Steve," said Erickson.

Erickson said that so many people helped out that she couldn't begin to name names because she would miss someone. "So many people called, emailed, donated leave, prayed and brought food," said Erickson.

Erickson said that there was never a time that Myers' parents felt the District didn't care. Team members visited during the day, at lunch and at night. Some team members went to Myers' house and mowed the lawn. "He has a big lawn too," said Erickson.

One message Myers gained from this frightening experience was that, "I have learned to value and appreciate life more."

Reflecting back, while sharing Myers' story, Erickson said, "It's a Christmas miracle. It let me know that there are still good people in the world."

Myers said that his favorite Christmas memory was spending Christmas in the Cayman Islands with family and friends.

Myers said, "We explored the water by fishing and snorkeling."

Life is going on as usual on a cold winter day. Fast forward. You're enjoying Christmas with loved ones. You can't even believe how much you've been through in the last six months. The best part is that you're alive and you know that you are loved by family and friends. Rewind. The cause of this reminiscent mellow mood: near death experience.

## Tips on how to recognize heat strokes:

**It's never too early or too late to recognize these symptoms of heat stroke or learn how to prevent them. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, warning signs include:**

- **red, hot, and dry skin**
- **throbbing headache**
- **dizziness/nausea**
- **confusion**
- **unconsciousness**
- **extremely high body temperature**

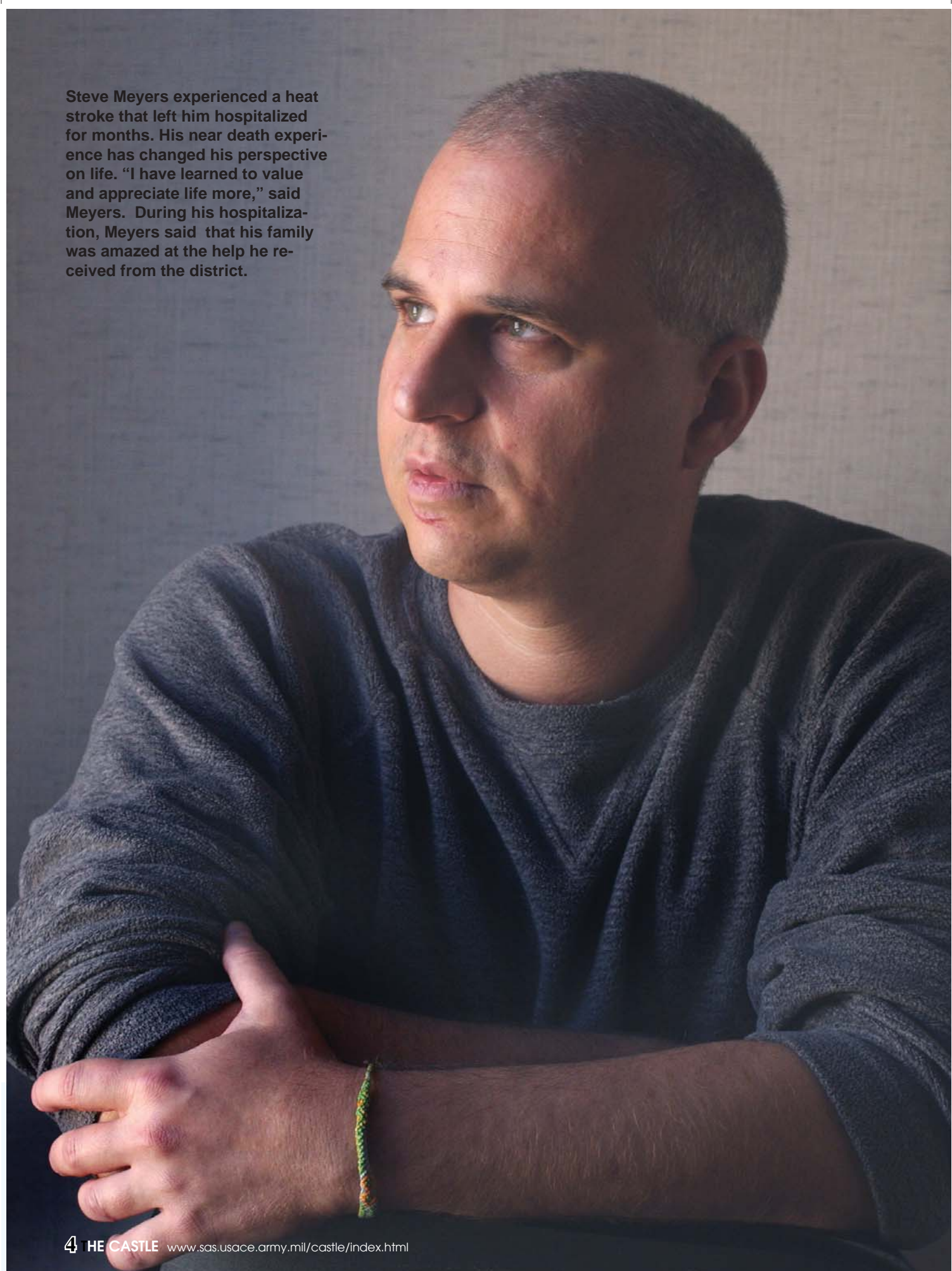
**Some ways to prevent heat related illnesses include:**

- **drink fluids, don't wait**
- **stay indoors**
- **wear lightweight clothing**





Steve Meyers experienced a heat stroke that left him hospitalized for months. His near death experience has changed his perspective on life. "I have learned to value and appreciate life more," said Meyers. During his hospitalization, Meyers said that his family was amazed at the help he received from the district.





When Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, Troy and Yvette Peters didn't hesitate to open up their doors to seven of their family members who were displaced as a result of the hurricane. The Peters are pictured here with some of their family members in a double garage that they converted into extra living space to accommodate family members. Pictured (Clockwise): Leila Hollis, Districts Small business Office; Yvette Peters; Troy Peters; Janet Mitchell (Sister of Troy Peters); Edith Peters (Mother of Troy Peters and Janet Mitchell) holding a photo of Thomas Peters (Deceased father of Troy Peters and Janet Mitchell); Troy Peters, Jr.; and Kaila Peters.



# New Orleans family finds a home

By Rashida Banks  
Editor/Staff Writer

When seven of Troy and Yvette Peters family members were displaced as a result of Hurricane Katrina, they didn't hesitate to open up their home and hearts to them.

"People say to me that what I am doing is wonderful, but to me it is an act of what I've been taught. If we were in the same predicament, our family would take us in too, because it's what we were taught to do," said Troy Peters, a pastor at St. Peters Missionary Baptist Church in Savannah.

Leila Hollis, chief, small business office, and close friend of the Peters says that this is not unusual for the Peters family.

"They are very sincere people – that's what drew us together. We also share the same morals and values," said Hollis. "The Peters not only share knowledge and information with people, but they put their own advice into action."

When the Peters family members arrived in Savannah, they had nothing but the clothes they left New Orleans with.

Knowing that their four bedroom two bath home would not be enough to accommodate seven extra people, the Peters became weekend warriors.

Troy, assisted by some of his church members spent Labor Day weekend converting the family's two-car garage into extra living space to accommodate the family. The room was equipped with bunk beds, new floors, and carpet.

"Everything in here was donated by different people in the community- the floors, walls, the beds, and the studs, everything.

Yvette, a stay at home mom, who home schools their children, immediately got on the phone with the church and emailed the home schooling community and explained the situation.

The response we got in return was unbelievable, according to Yvette.

"Within fifteen minutes, people were coming with clothes, food, paper products, and washing powder. If you can imagine this garage filled from top to bottom five times over with anything that we could possibly need, that's how it was. We didn't have to spend a penny on anything because people wanted to help. It is a blessing to see that the community that you live in is willing to help you in your time of need," said Yvette.

Hollis received donations from Corps team members as well.

Troy's sister Janet Mitchell, a 45-year resident of New Orleans says that she was determined to stay in the city.

"I took one suitcase with one day's worth of clothing," said Mitchell. "I didn't think that it would be to the magnitude that it was. I thought that I would be able to return home the next day."

Mitchell evacuated to Yazoo, Miss., with her husband, her nephew, his fiancé, and their two children. They stayed there for two days before relocating to Savannah to stay with the Peters.

Having been back to New Orleans twice since Hurricane Katrina, Mitchell says that she was able to salvage some pictures and clothing from the small cottage that she shared with her husband.

---

**"IN THE BITTERNESS  
OF IT ALL, WE STILL  
HAVE A REASON TO  
BE THANKFUL AND  
WE REFUSE TO  
COMPLAIN."**

---

Yvette Peters

"I am grateful to be here, but am still uncertain about a lot of things – like rebuilding versus relocating, and the amount of finances that we need to do either. There is no place like home, but I understand that you can't always be at home. You have to make home where you are," said Mitchell.

In the midst of everything, the Peters were devastated by another tragedy.

Thomas Peters, Troy's father, who had cancer, developed a blockage in his stomach and had to undergo surgery.

"The doctors went in thinking they could remove the blockage and he did not make it through the surgery," said Yvette.

"When it happened, we were devastated," said Yvette. "We decided that because there were so many family members here [in Savannah], we would bring the body here and

have a funeral."

Born and raised in New Orleans, Thomas Peters, a U.S. Army retiree and Korean War veteran was a "New Orleans at heart." It was the Peters' hope that when the city got back together they would be able to take him back there and bury him.

Little did Yvette and Troy know their hopes and prayers were about to be answered.

Speed and Adams, a local funeral home, heard about the tragedy and offered to hold Troy's father's body in Savannah at the funeral home until the city of New Orleans was reopened. The funeral home director also agreed to contact a funeral home in New Orleans every week until he found one that was open and would accept the body.

"He took care of all of the arrangements and we went to New Orleans to have the funeral," said Yvette. "He worked with us in unbelievable ways. Me and my husband were crying because he [the funeral home director] made it so easy during a time when we needed it to be easy. What should have been thousands of dollars wasn't. It was the favor of God."

Troy said that the hardest thing out of everything was losing his father.

"We know a lot of people who lost loved ones and the only thing they were able to do was to dig a hole and bury them where they were, but God blessed us to be able to have a full [Catholic] funeral for him here and then turn around and bury him in New Orleans," Troy said.

The Peters family usually celebrates Christmas in New Orleans. They plan to keep that tradition alive this year by cooking a traditional New Orleans style feast – gumbo, stuffed bell peppers, potato salad, sweet potatoes, coyote squash, macaroni and cheese, and pecan pie.

"In the bitterness of it all, we still have a reason to be thankful and we refuse to complain," said Yvette. "We are more than blessed. I found out that I'm 12 weeks pregnant. We are hoping and praying that it's a boy so we can name it after Troy's father. That would be a great blessing."



# Deployed in Iraq during Christmas Season

By Tiffany Holloway  
Staff Writer

Being deployed in Iraq especially during Christmas could be a depressing time for many people, but the office where Martin Muñoz, project engineer, works has been challenged by their resident officer in charge, Maj. John Hudson of Fort Carson, Colo., to bring the spirit of joy and happiness to the work environment just as you would at home.

"We each have to bring in one special Christmas decoration. At our Christmas party, we will have to explain to our team members why we chose that particular decoration," said Muñoz.

Muñoz said that Muslims do celebrate Christmas. "They believe that Jesus was an important or significant man. However, they do not believe that he is the son of God like we Christians do," said Muñoz.

As a matter of fact, the Iraqis sell Christmas trees in Baghdad.

To add to the Christmas spirit, Muñoz said that the dining facility will "put on a great dinner, like they did during Thanksgiving."

Muñoz has been deployed since late October and his wife has already sent four boxes of presents.

"I sent a box of goodies to my family. They have received their Christmas too," said Muñoz, who

has been scheduled to spend 13 months in Iraq.

"My wife and 13-year-old son have been very supportive. However, my 25-year-old son was devastated that I was deploying," said

SGT Mason of the 10th Combat Support Hospital of Fort Carson, Colo., holds a clipboard while Martin Muñoz donates platelets at the Combat Support Hospital, where there was a shortage of blood.

Muñoz. "I am a retired Army veteran, so my family is accustomed to me deploying. So, this is a cakewalk for all of us." He added, "The one thing that I will miss this holiday season is going hunting with my sons on Christmas Eve."

"I took a giant step from being a quality assurance representative and now I'm a project engineer," said Muñoz.

He took responsibility for five construction projects including a first modern post office, renovating a school, an academy, a health clinic and the national Iraqi patrol headquarters.

"My two favorite projects are the Academy of Health and Sciences and the national Iraqi patrol headquarters," said Muñoz.

At first he was apprehensive about the promotion but he realized that his job at the Fort Bragg Resident Office had already prepared him for this job. "Allen Hand, my resident engineer back at, Bragg has been very supportive by giving me assistance and advice over the phone and by email correspondence," said Muñoz.

"I feel like God put me here to oversee these projects." He added, "It feels great to be a part of the construction of the national Iraqi patrol headquarters because in a time where people might feel insecure, this project is a symbol of the future of law and order."

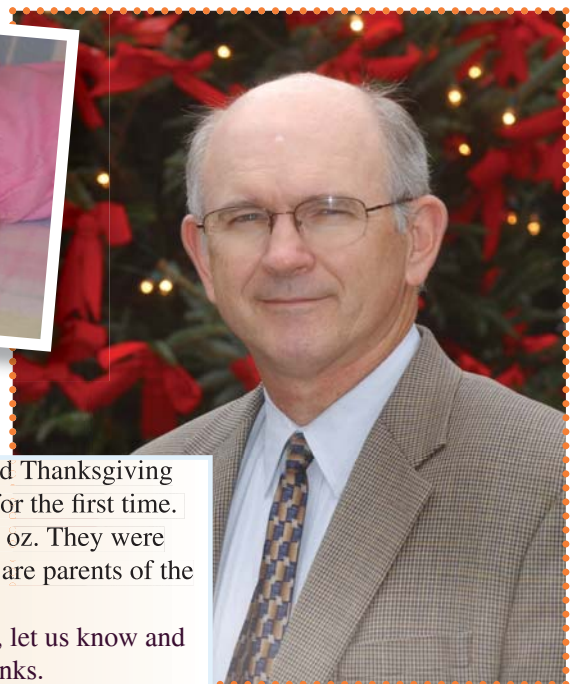
"The opportunity to help the Iraqi people is familiar to me. I also deployed to El Salvador and Honduras to re-build those war-torn countries after two-decade civil war in the 80s and natural disasters devastated Central America in the 90s," said Muñoz.



## Precious Gifts

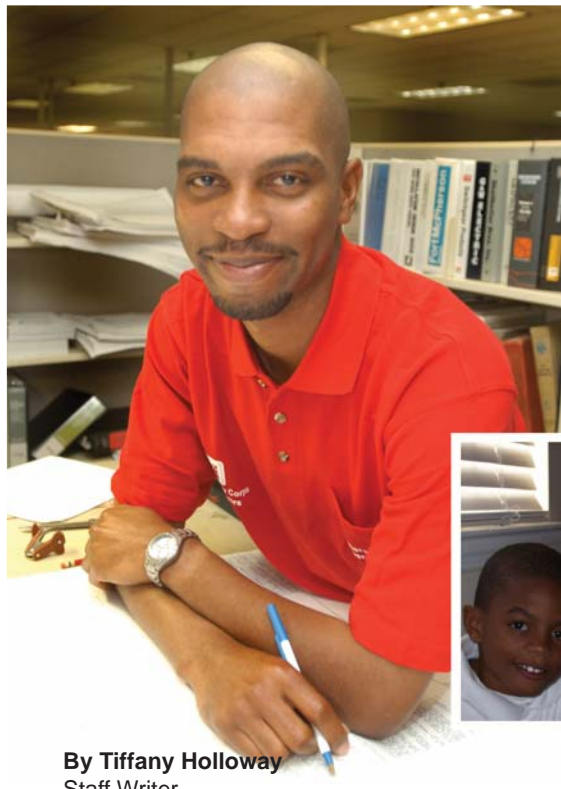
Tommy Hill, chief, real estate division and his wife, Nita celebrated Thanksgiving by seeing their twin granddaughter, DeLaney and grandson, Jackson for the first time. DeLaney weighed 3 pounds 11 oz. and Jackson weighed 3 pounds six oz. They were born Oct. 18. His daughter, Anne Marie and son-in-law Cody Jensen are parents of the twins. They live in Vernal, Utah.

\* Note: If you have a birth announcement of a child or grandchild, let us know and we will place it in the Castle. Send your announcement to Rashida Banks.





# Holidays away from home



By Tiffany Holloway  
Staff Writer



When most people get ready to travel for the holidays to have dinner with grandma and grandpa, two Savannah District team members, Mozelle Allen and Otis Anderson, unselfishly chose instead to deploy to Florida during the holiday season.

Allen, information technology specialist, deployed to West Palm Beach, Fla., to help with housing placement for the people who suffered through Hurricane Wilma's wrath.

Putting her own desires aside, she deployed during the holiday season. As a matter of fact, she deployed last year around the same time.

"There was a need for someone who had my expertise so I volunteered," said Allen.

"My husband knows that this is part of my job. My [adult] children know that I will still call and give them cooking directions," said Allen.

Allen said that she joined team members at the Golden Corral restaurant for Thanksgiving dinner.

Allen said that she was thankful for life. "I'm happy to be on this side of the dirt instead of under the dirt."

Allen's shift runs from 7 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. at the hotel, where the offices are located.

"It's been real busy. A lot of people are displaced. Families are still looking for loved ones," said Allen.

Allen said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has made provisions for families to live in trailers and mobile homes.

"I feel good helping people. I never meet the families but it's nice to see an application that I typed up and the family gets approved for a trailer," said Allen. "I get teary-eyed."

Even though Allen said she was a big holiday person, she volunteered to extend her deployment in Florida, after receiving permission from her supervisor. "I'm not sure when I will come home but the latest would be around January 1."

She said that she plans on celebrating Christmas, if she's still in Florida by buying Christmas CDs and watching Christmas movies on television. "I'm going to miss my family, especially kisses from my grandbaby," said Allen.

She said her Christmas wish of being alive and happy mattered to her, not material things.

Otis Anderson, an electrical engineer, deployed to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to help with roofing and quality assurance. He decided to deploy because it was "something different" and he wanted to help families have a roof over their heads (literally).

Anderson said that what he missed most about Thanksgiving at home was, "his family, football, and the Thanksgiving dinner." Later he went into more detail about family.

"My daughter was born premature and weighed 3 pounds," said Anderson.

She was born August 29 and her due date was October 21. She stayed in the hospital for three weeks. Anderson said, "My wife and I weren't too nervous because the doctors kept reassuring us that she was going to be okay." Now, she weighs 10 pounds and five ounces according to the doctor.

Even though he couldn't be with his immediate family, he did enjoy a delicious Thanksgiving dinner with his grandfather, uncle, and aunt in Miami.

"We had chicken, macaroni and cheese, and dressing," said Anderson.

Even though Allen and Anderson didn't spend Thanksgiving in Savannah with their families, they helped others as well as themselves remember the true meaning of Thanksgiving and capture the spirit of Christmas.





# Tree decorating tradition brings joy to students

**By Tiffany Holloway**  
Staff Writer

Savannah District headquarters main lobby started off with a Christmas tree with lights, but around 10 a.m. on Dec. 2 it turned into a winter wonderland. The second and third grade students from Hodge Elementary School sing five songs which included: Jingle Bells, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Rockin' Christmas, Must be Santa, and We Wish you a Merry Christmas. The students wore their Santa helper hats. They decorated the tree with a variety of ornaments: angels, apples, snowflakes, candy canes, stockings and wreaths.

Second grader, Dominique Andrews, 7, said she had fun decorating the tree. Her favorite song was Rockin' Christmas.

The angels were made by the students.

Third grader, Akeri Bailey, 8, said "I made a blue angel."

"I made a red angel and put glitter on it," said third grader, Cameron Redmend. "It took about 20 minutes to make."

The District partners with Hodge Elementary School students' visit every December. The Employee Recreation Association (ERA ) planned the agenda.

Carolyn Heyward, president of ERA and branch design secretary, said, "We planned the event in July. This is our 'event kick-off' for the year. We want to give the students an opportunity to have fun and stay motivated."



Above: Hodge Elementary students sing Christmas carols for the District. Left: Santa shares goodies with the students.



Carolyn Thomas, Hodge Elementary teacher, said, "I love it. It's good interaction for the kids. They stay motivated to do well in school, observe the Corps' working environment and meet some of its employees, build relationships as well as friendships and practice their manners."

After putting ornaments on the tree, the students were escorted to the executive conference room decorated with green, red, and snowman tablecloths, Christmas tree, and a snowman decoration. When they walked in the room, they chimed in with "uuuhs."

The ERA served the students pizza, chips, cookies, and a beverage. They watched the movie, How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Third grader, Lamar Oliver, 8, said that he was surprised and didn't know they were going to watch a movie.

Last but not least, Santa Claus (Steven Hill, project management division) delivered gifts to all the students.

# Santa's helper gets recognition on Oprah

By Rashida Banks  
Editor/Staff Writer

District real estate assistant Jennifer Penn is very proud of her sister, Chicago resident Angela Morris. Who wouldn't be proud? Not only does Angela save lives, she was honored for her work on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Morris, a recovery room nurse at Chicago's Mercy Hospital, signed up as a Red Cross volunteer shortly after Hurricane Katrina blew ashore. The Red Cross sent her to Port Allen, La., to a shelter with 400 evacuees. She mended wounds, gave out medication and treated people for rashes they had gotten from contaminated floodwaters.

Penn said that her sister, who is the second eldest of eleven siblings, has always been a helper.

"She takes extra care of her patients, her children, and even her nieces and nephews. She has always been that type of person," said Penn.

Penn said that she thought her sister's decision to volunteer was wonderful.

"She called me and asked a lot of questions about the atmosphere and lodging, because we have deployed with the Corps a lot on disaster missions. With the devastation being so great in Louisiana, there was a lack of places to stay and a lot of the problems but my sister's response to it all was simply, 'Well I'm going to do it anyway.'

Penn said that her sister was watching the news one day, and saw all of the children that were displaced without their parents as a result of Katrina, and it brought her to tears. She said, 'Somebody's got to go and take care of the children.'

Martin was profiled on the Oprah Winfrey show after her daughter, Andrea Martin wrote a letter to the show.

Andrea says that her mother felt humbled by the people who lost everything in the storm.

"I'm so proud of my mother for going down to help with the Hurricane Katrina rescue effort," Andrea wrote to The Oprah Winfrey Show. "She sets such a great example for how you should always help people in need."

Dear Oprah,

My name is Andrea Morris. I'm from Homewood, Illinois. I'm writing to you on behalf of my mother, Angela Morris. She is a registered nurse, 52 years old, and works in the recovery room of Mercy Hospital on Chicago's Southside.

My mom saw hurricane Katrina on the news and immediately signed up with the Red Cross. She left about a week after the hurricane hit.

I was very worried about her being subjected to those harsh conditions, but she was determined to help out.

My mom was sent to Port Allen, Louisiana. She worked at a community center that converted into a shelter that held about 400 evacuees.

When she first arrived at the shelter, the evacuees had not yet received any medical attention. My mom administered first aid, treated people for rashes that they had gotten from contaminated water and dispensed medications.

The evacuees staying in the shelter were very stressed and rightfully so. Fights broke out daily and it was a challenge maintaining a calm atmosphere. People were constantly calling the shelter trying to locate lost relatives and friends. There were many Red Cross workers that left early, but my mom stuck with her commitment.

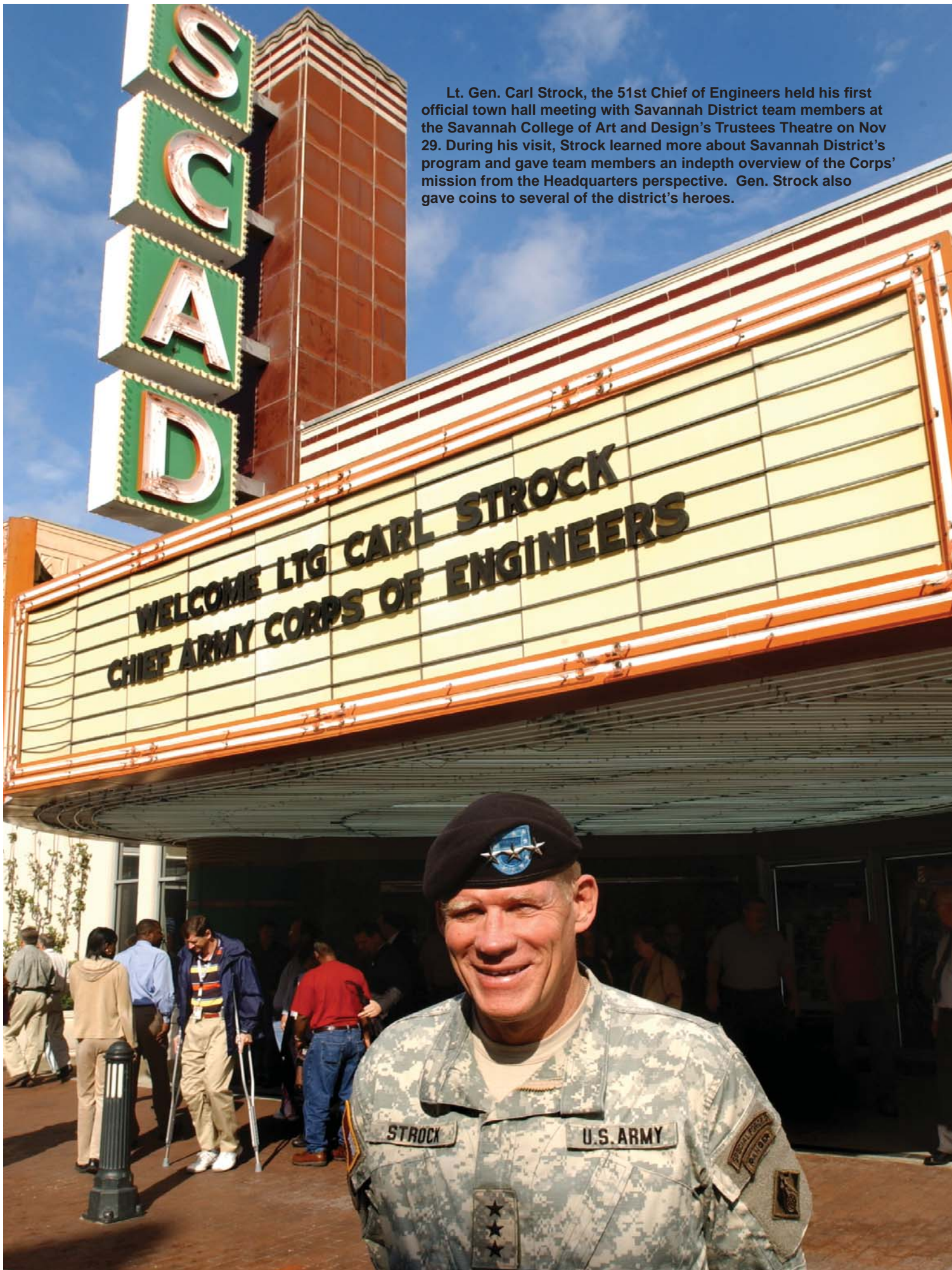
The nurses stayed in a local church that set up cots for them to sleep on. There was no shower so my mom had to walk a quarter of a mile each way just to take a shower.

When my mom came home, she felt humbled because she just left so many people that had lost everything that they had, and she came back to her home and her family.

I'm so proud of my mother for going down to help out with the Hurricane Katrina rescue efforts. She sets such a great example for her coworkers, her friends, and our family of how you should always help people in need.

Sincerely,

*Andrea Morris*



Lt. Gen. Carl Strock, the 51st Chief of Engineers held his first official town hall meeting with Savannah District team members at the Savannah College of Art and Design's Trustees Theatre on Nov 29. During his visit, Strock learned more about Savannah District's program and gave team members an indepth overview of the Corps' mission from the Headquarters perspective. Gen. Strock also gave coins to several of the district's heroes.

