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First female dam tender ready for nighttime Rio Hondo mission

By Mike Tharp

ROSEMEAD, Calif. — In the steamy summer of 1929, William Faulkner worked the night shift at a power plant in Oxford, Miss. During six weeks of his solitary nocturne, the young novelist wrote “As I Lay Dying,” one of the books cited when Faulkner later won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Mary Fierros doesn't expect similar inspiration to strike when she becomes the first female dam tender in District history. Instead, the 19-year-old community college student will be content just to get the 7 p.m.- 7 a.m. shift done. “I'm not really nervous, just really excited,” she says, “considering I'm just a student and they're giving me so much responsibility.”



Vic Renteria goes over instructions on how to run the backup generator with Alex Martinez and Mary Fierros.

Fierros, who's studying forensics at Rio Hondo College, has worked as a secretary at the District baseyard for 16 months.

Eventually, she wants to become a police officer “and maybe later a detective,” she says, so she was looking for a challenge outside the office. “I got tired of the paperwork and I

was hearing good stories from guys out in the field. And they treat me like one of the crew.”

Ed Kohnman, who himself tended dams for two decades, now supervises the nine structures operated by the District. He enthusiastically has been pushing Fierros for the nighttime post at Whittier Narrows (Rio Hondo) Dam. “She's not afraid to get her hands dirty, not afraid to work any job, anywhere,” he says. “This is the first time we've ever had a woman even offer. It's a male-dominated section because it's mostly manual labor. But she filled sand-



What a dam tender sees in the dungeon-like Hoist Room.

Continued on Page 2

Inside This Issue

Morro Bay
District helps speed up permit process 4

Santa Clarita perchlorate
District cleanup role . . . 6

Kosovo
PM part of Peacekeeping force. 8

Retirees' luncheon
"Vital part of District history" 10

Real Estate
Recruiting centers 12

Typhoon Chata'an
Recovery in Guam 14

Ho Ho Ho!
The Corps's youngest members celebrate 16

In Brief around LAD
Donations and thanks . .18

Eeeek!
It gets spooky up on the 10th floor 20

Dam tender—Continued from page 1

bags with us on the L.A. River project, so she's fit."

Adds Terry Wotherspoon, facility manager at the baseyard, "She's very good at what she does for us."

Some 15 miles east of downtown District headquarters, the Rio Hondo Dam comprises a vital part of the region's water conservation program and drinking water supply. Residents of Montebello, Pico Rivera and several other communities rely on the dam for what comes out of their spigots, so its operation must be constantly monitored and maintained. "All the cities below have their straws in," says Kohnman.

One recent morning, Kohnman and veteran tender Vic Renteria shepherded Fierros and another student, Alex Martinez, around the dam explaining how things work. All were wearing the brown uniform shirts of the Corps field hand, complete with castle logo and their names embroidered on front. Fierros clearly was proud to see red thread (which matched her nail polish) declaring "dam tender" on hers.

Simply put, a southern California dam tender serves as the lone cop on the beat for the Reservoir Operations Center (ROC) at District headquarters. The center acts as a command-post nervous system, continually processing information gathered at the dam sites, then regulating water flow. Los Angeles County also is in the loop. Much of the process is per-



Ed Kohnman points out a water-depth gauge to Mary Fierros.

formed by computers hard-wired to telemetric measuring stations at the dam and upstream and downstream on the rivers. But there's plenty of room—and need—for the human element, which is where the tenders come in. A machine might register an object weighing 1,500 pounds stuck near one of the gates. But only a pair of eyes peering through binoculars into a horizontal rainstorm

can tell whether the object diverting the river's flow is an abandoned car, a huge log or Sasquatch.

And only a trained team member can then clamber down the 25 steps from atop the dam to the hoist room. There, to dou-

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ble-check the four yellow gauges inside that show the river's inflow and outflow within 1/50th of an inch. (The hoist room is a shoebox-shaped dungeon that runs the length of the dam and houses the tender's office, gate motors, monitoring gear and a backup power generator.)

Renteria, who spent several dry-docked years as a Navy civilian diesel mechanic on such noted vessels as the *Queen Mary* and Howard Hughes's super-secret *Glo-mar Explorer*, shows Mary and Alex the ropes from one end of the hoist room to the other: "I give ROC a report and they may say, 'We need you to operate your gates,' and I'll set the gates to whatever level they say, long as the water doesn't start going over the banks or eroding the banks. Opening up the gates is like flushing a toilet, except it takes 30 minutes for a gate to close or open."

Renteria spends 20 minutes walking the youngsters through the crucial steps to run the backup generator. If, for instance, power goes out during a storm, the dam must be able to keep functioning. A red, yellow and black diesel generator the size of two upended soft drink vending machines serves the purpose, and the student tenders refer to a framed set of instructions as their instructor checks their work. "The job is easy," says Renteria, who's worked for the Corps more than two decades. "You just have to keep your mind on what you're doing."

Martinez holds the instructions as Fierros inserts a finger like a dipstick into the generator to check its water level. "Why are the lights yellow?" she asks. "These lights tell you what?" wonders Alex. Mary dons red earmuffs as Renteria cranks up the generator, and a jet-wash of sound ensues until Kohnman signals to shut it down.

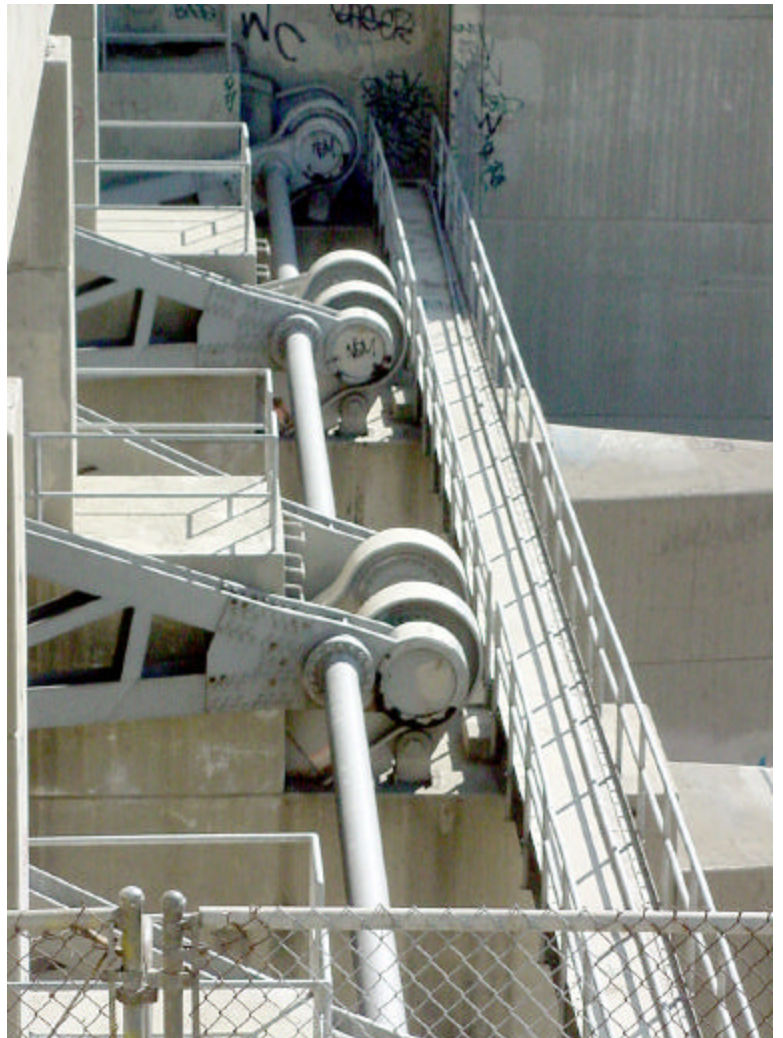
"When you're here, you're in charge," Renteria explains. "When you're here, it's just you in this place. You're going to hear funny noises when you're in here by yourself. You gotta keep your radio on. You're talking people's lives, houses..."

Injects Kohnman: "When you're here, you're running the dam!"

If the prospect of such lonesome responsibility is daunting to either Mary or Alex, they don't show it. Fierros, who has cousins working for the Corps downtown and as police officers, lifts weights several times a week at a West Covina gym. At 5-feet-9, she's tall enough to reach all the switches and gauges at the dam, but feminine enough that she collects Bratz Pack dolls. Does she feel any extra pressure, being the first female dam tender? "No, just excited. I feel special because Ed has chosen me. Out here, I'm treated as equally as other people in the Corps."

Martinez, from El Monte, has spent two years with the District while studying graphic design at East L.A. Occupational College, and hopes to latch onto a permanent position with the District. "Right now, we're alternates," he says, "which means if somebody can't be here, they'll call us. But I'd like to be there even if somebody else is working so I can watch them and learn."

Like airline pilots, combat grunts and beat cops, dam tenders endure hours of boredom punctuated with moments of sheer terror. "The first time you do it by yourself, you're scared," says Renteria. "You don't want to push any buttons. But once you get your system down, you just do it



Massive motors raise and lower the dam's four spillway

over and over, the same way."

In Faulkner's 1930 novel, the Bundren family is carrying their mother's coffin for burial to another county. They must cross the flood-swollen Yoknapatawpha River, but one bridge has washed out and another is damaged. They try to use it anyway, and their mules and wagon are swept downriver. They barely save the coffin.

In other words, sounds like it's time for a dam tender.

District agrees with Sustainable Conservation Group to speed up Morro Bay permit process

By Mike Tharp

“How can we help?”

If the mustachioed English major from San Francisco State was surprised at the question from COL Richard G. Thompson, commander of the Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, he didn't show it. Instead, Robert Neale, a program director with San Francisco-based Sustainable Conservation, simply nodded. “Just give us your support,” he said. “That would help.”

Both parties understand that conservation must occur on private land. Both know how complex and even contradictory environmental regulations can be. Both want to save time and money for their stakeholders. And both are committed to upholding environmental principles.

And, as a recent agreement document suggests, the

Corps and the conservation group's partners – the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – are willing to work together seeking common ground in the sensitive Morro Bay watershed in central California. On Nov. 21, the District agreed to provide timely processing of nationwide permit applications for projects that qualify under the “Morro Bay Partners in Restoration Program.”

“With all the (regulatory) boxes already checked, we can issue a nationwide permit verification letter

quickly,” says Lisa Mangione, a Regulatory Branch Project Manager. Adds Neale, “The two groups (CSLRCD and NRCS) are perfect partners with the Corps for this project. It's a real leveraging of skill, experience and mandate.”

Morro Bay projects under Corps jurisdiction most likely to be affected by the accelerated permit process include erosion control and erosion damage repair. That's usually done by stabilizing stream banks with planting and by clearing channels of sediment and debris. Sustainable Conservation “provides a much-needed service in that they not only act as facilitators for regulatory agencies, but they're wonderful mediators for ranching and farming

communities,” says Mangione. “They don't have an agenda except to improve conditions in the watershed, and that makes them non-threatening to the various stakeholders.”

In addition to the November agreement, COL Thompson cited the District's aggressive SAMP (Special Area Management Plan) programs, “which assess entire watersheds” and suggested that the District's Regulatory Branch or some of its projects could dovetail with Sustainable Conservation's efforts. “I can get you in contact with the folks at our (South Pacific) Division,” he told Neale, “and every six months our staff meets with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to coordinate issues. That might be a forum where you could say something about your program.”



Robert Neale, program director of Sustainable Conservation, watches as COL Richard G. Thompson, district engineer, signs a Morro Bay agreement document.

Sustainable Conservation, a nonprofit organization founded 10 years ago, hopes to repeat the success Neale says it has had with a pilot “Partners in Restoration” (PIR) program in Monterey County's Elkhorn Slough watershed. The Elkhorn Slough PIR program was initiated in 1996, and projects under the program began in 1998. The 45,000-acre Elkhorn Slough watershed flows into a 4,000-acre protected marshland within the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. PIR's goals are to improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat and

preserve agricultural resources. To achieve these goals, PIR field teams sought to educate all parties – regulatory agencies, farmers, ranchers, landowners – about planning issues pertaining to proposed conservation practices in the watershed.

The goal: one-stop regulatory shopping.

PIR programs thin the thicket of regulatory review, thereby removing disincentives for farmers, ranchers and rural landowners otherwise discouraged by the time, cost and complexity of rules governing their management practices. If the permitting process were streamlined, these ground-zero stewards would voluntarily do things that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and en-

By Fred-Otto Egele



The Morro Bay area

hance habitat on their land.

In establishing a PIR program for a particular watershed, Sustainable Conservation develops relationships and gathers data and information from the agency partners regarding their laws, resource concerns and ideas for conditions and protective measures to be included in the program. PIR actually results in agreements and/or permits issued to the NRCS and CSLRCD that cover a specific set of activities/best management practices within a strictly defined geographic area, in this case the Morro Bay watershed. By focusing on what Neale calls the “low hanging fruit” – issues about which there’s win-win consensus – stakeholders begin to understand one another. For example, says Neale, “It’s hard to find someone who wants erosion.”

Both the Corps and Sustainable Conservation recognize that people’s livelihoods, delicate ecosystems, laws and often overlapping regulatory jurisdictions are at stake. But by introducing previously competing parties to one another, and by overcoming

cultural differences through identifying shared interests, PIR can decrease environmental *and* economic losses. That approach helps make it easier and less costly for those seeking permits to get them, cuts staff time for regulators and, ta-daah! helps the environment.

Sustainable Conservation points to five years of results at Elkhorn Slough, where the NRCS and the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County are project partners. More than 40 PIR projects there have kept more than 40,000 tons of sediment from entering the slough, its tributaries and the national sanctuary. More than a mile and a half of stream bank and channel have been restored and/or revegetated. The practices coordinated by PIR will help prevent future erosion and sedimentation.

Neale says the success at Monterey motivates his group to replicate it at Morro Bay and beyond. The Morro Bay PIR program covers the entire watershed. Importantly, although the activities covered under the program won’t occur in the sensitive estuary at the watershed terminus, the benefits of the program – improved water quality, decreased sedimentation, etc. – will. Some 30 areas around the state have been identified as being “ready and ripe for this kind of permitting education.” By 2006, Sustainable Conservation and the NRCS hope to train at least 10 to 20 “watershed coordinators” in these areas. “That’s critical if we want to see real improvement in California habitat and watersheds,” he says.

Ever since LTG Bob Flowers, the Corps commander, announced the agency’s “Environmental Operating Principles” last March, the Corps and the District have reaffirmed their commitment to achieve environmental sustainability. The meeting between COL Thompson and Neale signified the Corps’ willingness to consider creative strategies to perform its mission.

Said COL Thompson after the meeting: “Anything that promotes cooperative energy among agencies, streamlines procedures and helps landowners is a good thing.”



Willits looking for food in the mudflats.

Santa Clarita perchlorate project casts Corps in starring cleanup role

By Mike Tharp

The first documented discovery of gold in California.
The first successful oil well in the West.

Those two historical examples, in 1842 and 1876, of good stuff found in the ground of the Santa Clarita Valley are overshadowed today by some bad stuff in that same ground—perchlorate and other chemicals contaminating soil and groundwater. And like silent-screen cowboys Tom Mix and William S. Hart, who made the valley's vistas the backdrop for many of their westerns, the Army Corps of Engineers is riding to the rescue.

With its local sponsor, the Castaic Lake Water Agency, the Los Angeles District is conducting a feasibility study on how best to clean up subterranean pockets of the noxious salt, which has been called a human health risk by the EPA. Corps contractors are now drilling wells up to 1,650 feet deep on a 1,000-acre sphere of land to get samples of soil and water to test. The two-phase study, currently budgeted for \$7 million, is expected to cost more than \$9 million and may get \$3 million more this fiscal year. The Castaic agency is sharing costs with the Corps 50-50.

"I compliment the Corps on the progress it has made so far," says Dan Masnada, general manager of the wa-

ter agency. "Its role will be critical in helping us define the nature and extent of the contamination. The Corps is providing the data that will assist us in our efforts to remediate the groundwater contamination. So often people look at the federal government or large bureaucracies and criticize them for how long it takes to get anything done, but certainly in this instance, I'm very happy with the Corps's progress and work."

Adds Lisa Hardy, a senior planner for the city of Santa Clarita who's been monitoring the cleanup project for years: "We're very enthusiastic about the Corps's involvement. The Corps has done the most cleanup work we've seen on the site, and we hope they continue the work through 2003-2004. We're thrilled."

Once they get the data, the Corps and the water agency will huddle with other regulatory bodies, elected officials, residents, private companies and others to decide on long-term treatment technology solutions. A possible method is a pump-and-treat process cleanup strategy. "Pumping and treating equipment could be sitting out there for months and possibly years," says District Project Manager Ayed Ireifej, "pumping out the water, cleaning it and reinjecting back into the ground, provided it's clean, with any contaminated water disposed off-site." The water agency's immediate goal is to find an interim solution so it can reactivate the wells and again use them to draw water.

Sacramento District is also providing some of its environmental expertise in the field, and L.A. District's Priscilla Perry, then a technical manager in the Engineer Division, was instrumental in pulling the project together early on.

The Corps' involvement comes at a critical juncture in nationwide efforts to gauge and deal with the perchlorate problem. Up to 20 states, many of them in the West, contain sites with contamination levels higher than that recommended by new EPA guidelines. Most worrisome, several of the sites feed into aquifers and other sources of drinking water for heavily populated urban areas. The EPA, for instance, has detected perchlorate in 284 drinking water sources in Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.

And, as the West's metastasizing edge cities show, the old real estate mantra of "location, location, loca-



Contact crews drill wells to test groundwater.

tion” must now include “water, water, water.” Without it, there is no, or slow, growth. The perchlorate problem could well determine whether a city can expand, whether a developer can build, whether a farmer can irrigate or if wells and other sources of water are shut down. Thus the Corps could be in the eye of a regulatory hurricane sweeping across several states. “If there’s no water, you can’t grow anymore,” says Ireifej, “which creates not only a health problem but a growth problem.”

In nearly all cases, perchlorate contamination comes at former defense industry sites. In Santa Clarita, the area where the Corps is working—between I-5 and Highway 114—has hosted companies for more than 60 years that made dynamite, ammunition, practice bombs, flares, signal cartridges, fireworks, boosters and other explosives-related products. From 1967-99 the site was owned by Whittaker Corp., which, according to the Signal daily newspaper in Santa Clarita, made gas generators, rockets, practice bombs and Sidewinder missiles.

In 1997 scientists detected perchlorate in four wells producing drinking water, with levels slightly above Dept. of Health Services (DHS) standards. A year later, the chemical salt was confirmed in two wells, again with levels above DHS standards. All the wells remain shut down.

Santa Clarita’s situation is complicated by the fact that in recent years the site has been privately owned by a Phoenix-based company, Remediation Financial Inc. (RFI). The firm’s subsidiary, Santa Clarita LLC, had been continuing some of the development plans originally proposed by Whittaker: Porta Bella, a complex which would feature nearly 3,000 homes, an industrial park and other facilities. It was after the Santa Clarita City Council approved the project in 1995 that the perchlorate problem was discovered, and the private firm has been hamstrung financially in its plans ever since. RFI is now trying to sell the property, and lawsuits and counterclaims have ensued over who’s responsible for paying how much of the cleanup.

In late November, the Signal newspaper reported that a North Carolina company, Cherokee Investment Partners Inc., had agreed to buy the land from RFI. Although the agreement isn’t yet completed, the deal dovetails with Cherokee’s corporate portfolio, which includes some 300 “brownfield” properties nationwide. According to Dow Jones Newswires, Cherokee pays cash for the properties and indemnifies the sellers against future liabilities stemming from contamination.

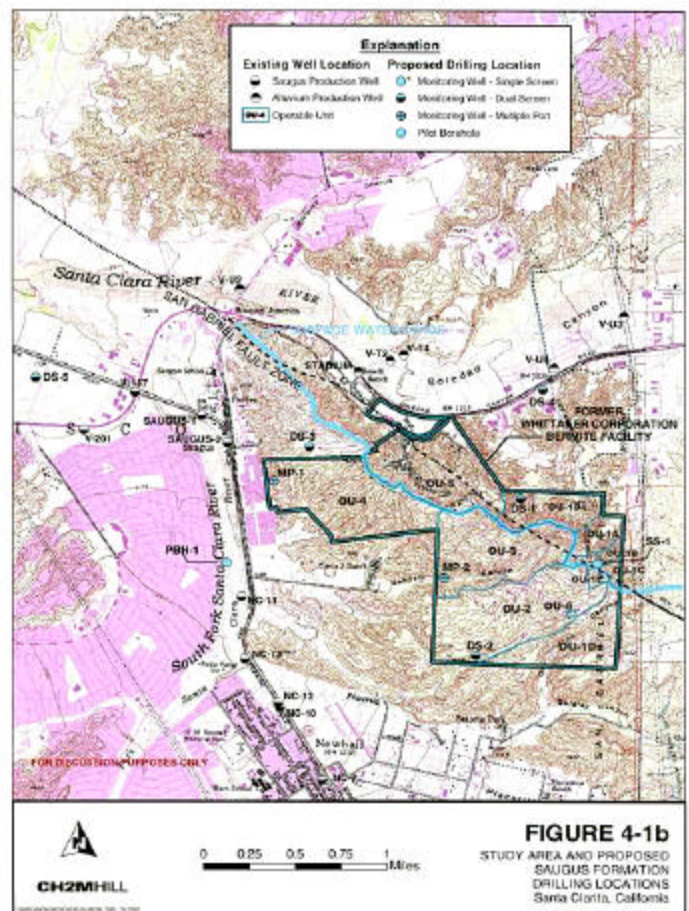


The Santa Clarita mountains loom over a district cleanup study.

District file photos

Whatever happens, it’s become clear to many Santa Clarita stakeholders and others that, without the Corps’ measured intervention and impartial data retrieval, nothing would get done, other than finger-pointing. Says Ireifej: “Sometimes we see ourselves in the middle, between the site owner and members of the community. It’s a very tough balance, but we try to keep the balance and do what we’ve been directed by Congress to do.”

Sounds a lot like what William S. Hart (for whom a Santa Clarita high school is named) said when asked how he became a cowboy movie star in the 1920s: “If they want you, they want you, and you have mighty little to say about it.”



Drumming up support:

Ken Morris worked with Corps personnel during six-month Kosovo peacekeeping mission

By Mike Tharp

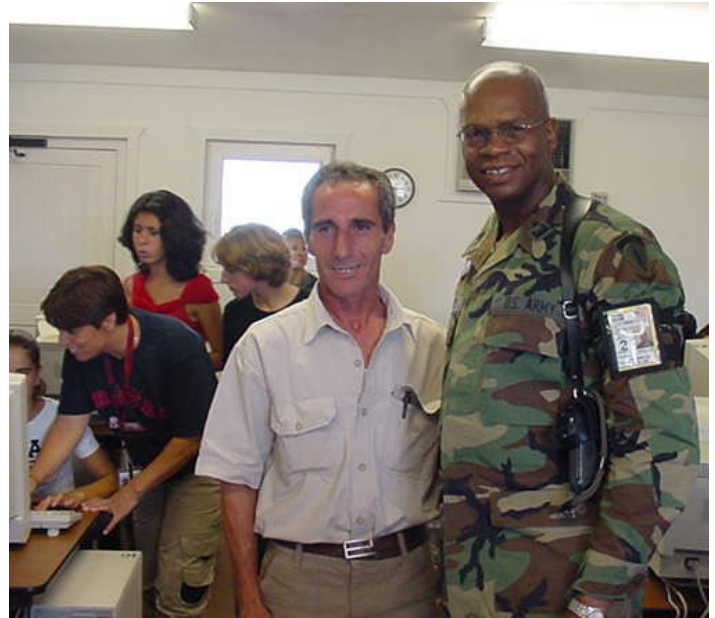
CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo--It's a long way from playing the drums in a South Carolina high school band to giving the keynote address on the Army's 227th birthday to Camp Bondsteel peacekeepers in Kosovo.

That's the journey the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Project Manager Ken Morris has taken. Morris, a former Marine Corps officer and 14-year veteran of L.A. District, now devotes his time to the Santa Ana River Mainstream Project. But for six months this year, until Oct. 1, he donned his silver oak leaves as an Army Reserve lieutenant colonel and helped maintain and upgrade the largest U.S. military base built from the mud up since the Vietnam War.

Camp Bondsteel, named after a Medal of Honor winner in Vietnam, occupies nearly a thousand acres in southeast Kosovo, the Yugoslavian province that was the site of a bitter 1999 war between NATO and Yugoslav forces. Like so many other parts of the Balkans, the struggle was sparked by ethnic and religious conflicts between predominantly Christian Serbs and predominantly Muslim Kosovars; the clash in the province was further complicated by political and economic disputes between Serbs and Albanians, with the latter seeking independence, or at least autonomy.

KFOR, the multinational peacekeeping force, entered Kosovo after most of the fighting had stopped in June 1999. Even before the ceasefire, however, U.S. military minds had been planning for what became Camp Bondsteel, near the Macedonian border. As their anti-template, they used the entry of American peacekeepers into Bosnia in 1995, when soldiers hunkered in tents for months. In Kosovo, conversely, more than 5,000 Yanks would be housed, fed and watered in near-Stateside conditions on four U.S. base camps.

Enter the engineers, military and civilian. Their 1999 efforts led to the construction of more than 25 kilometers of roads and 300-plus buildings, surrounded by seven miles of earthen berms, nearly five times that in concertina wire, watch towers and a chopper landing area. Bondsteel residents now refer to "downtown, midtown and uptown," and take advantage of 24/7 gyms, a library, retail shops, a chapel and laundry and dining facilities.



U.S. Army photo

LTC Kenneth Morris with a school teacher at a new school in Kosovo.

Three years later Morris as the Task Force Falcon/Kosovo Director of Public Works continued the mission: "Running all construction at the base camp day-to-day." As team leader of a seven-man facility engineers group with the Army Reserve, Morris oversaw the infrastructure of the camp. Under his supervision two new PXs, two MWR (morale, welfare and recreation) facilities, base camp generator systems, utility lines, a hospital complex expansion and more housing were built.

He worked closely with Brown & Root Services, a Houston-based subsidiary of Halliburton Inc., the Dallas company that has been active in military construction projects since the Vietnam War. The contractor soon became one of the biggest employers in Kosovo, and Morris estimates that workers on the base earned \$900 to \$1,500 a month, compared to a province average of \$75-\$100. (That's for those with jobs; unemployment ranges as high as 70 percent.) "The military has been a godsend," Morris says. "People told me, 'America has brought order and opportunity to our country.'"

Morris's team was "the backbone of my operation," he says, and it included a senior bridge engineer from Caltrans in San Jose, a construction engineer from the city of Fremont, an engineer technician from Caltrans and a structural engineer from Parsons Engineering in Oakland.



provided school supplies and clothing donated from the U.S. and repaired the schoolhouse. “The kids were very, very happy to see us,” the father of three grown children and a 10-year-old stepdaughter recalls. “I had tears in my eyes the first time we did it. As we were driving away, they were standing in the windows, wearing the little hats we gave them. I almost didn’t want to leave.”

So whither Kosovo? “I see the glass as half full—with some assistance,” Morris says of the outlook for peace in the province. “It’s a country that’s coming of age, coming into a new existence.” What’s needed most now, he adds, is economic aid to install and upgrade such basics as electricity, a water system, better roads and decent housing to replace many that were burned or bombed three years ago.

His public works staff totaled 22, and included five Corps civilians from several districts in the U.S. and Germany. “It’s an example of Corps of Engineers partnerships in the States doing the same partnerships overseas on the Kosovo mission.

Morris also employed 10 local nationals—Albanians and Serbs to work in the Directorate of Public Works. “The fact that we’ve been there, helping an experiment take place, bringing workers to the base camps to work side-by-side, let them see the value of each person as an individual,” Morris says. “Because of that they could say, ‘We’re different, but we can get along.’”

As if these tasks weren’t enough, Morris also served as commanding officer and deputy commanding officer for the Falcon Area Support Group for two months during the deployment.

For the first couple of years after KFOR moved in, tension remained high and there were several deadly incidents involving the Kosovo Liberation Army and others. Morris is pleased to report that things have quieted down a lot. For example, when he first deployed, he never left his barracks without a helmet and Kevlar vest; by the time he left, he was walking around with a soft cap and no vest. “We were trying to send a message to the people of Kosovo that things had gotten better,” Morris explains. Another example: When he first arrived, American soldiers frequently served as escorts for Serbs going to hospital or shopping; this fall, a lot of those escorts were no longer needed.

To help win hearts and minds, the public works people also adopted Osman Mani Elementary School near the base camp. They regularly visited the primitive structure,

Since their return, Morris’s reserve team has gone back to the end of the line in case of any call-up for Iraq or another overseas mission. “We’ll be coming to the front of the line in two years,” he says, “but that doesn’t prevent them from saying, ‘We need a lieutenant colonel over here.’”

Meantime, Morris, who attended college on a music scholarship, and his wife Tiza are preparing for the 33rd reunion of his high school band in Charleston, S.C. “Knowing what I know now, if I’d wanted to have had a music career back then, I know I could have done it,” he says.

Which resembles what he said in that June 14 anniversary speech in Kosovo: “The American soldier is unbeatable.”



One of the many projects being built in Kosovo.

Retirees ‘Vital Part’ of District History

By Mike Tharp
Photos by Fred-Otto Egeler

“You are a vital part of our history,” COL Richard G. Thompson, district engineer, told L.A. District retirees at their annual luncheon Oct. 24, at the San Antonio Winery in downtown Los Angeles.

“All of you should be talking to your grandkids about working in the District. We consider you all a vital part of our recruiting effort.”

Some 20 former team members attended the event, joined by a dozen or so staff chiefs, COL Thompson and Deputy Commander LTC John Guenther. Past and present District workers mingled and talked over gourmet salads, lasagna, linguine, rotisserie chicken and other specialties of the 75-year-old family-owned winery.

Retirees themselves picked the place, which has been favorably reviewed in the L.A. Times, Washington Post and many local newspapers. (One example of the winery’s service: before lunch, Steve Ribol, its president, quietly helped plug in extension cords for the gear to be used in the afternoon’s formal presentation.)

Using a command briefing slide show prepared by the



Steve Temmel (right) and retiree

Public Affairs staff, COL Thompson updated retirees on the scale and impact of the myriad projects now overseen by the District. Some of them, he pointed out, were conceived and begun by many of those in the room, continuing to be carried out by current team members. LACDA (Los Angeles County Drainage Area), Prado and Hansen Dams were among the projects COL Thompson cited whose genesis occurred during the active careers of the retirees.



From left to right: Robert Koplín, Mike Evasovic and Ronald Weiss.

The crowd’s biggest ovation came when COL Thompson introduced Steve Temmel, now District chief counsel: “Steve is going to be at next year’s luncheon as a retiree.”

COL Thompson invited retirees to the District headquarters building for next year’s luncheon. “I’d like to host you in the District,” he said. “You bring a wealth of history to many of the projects that we’re working on right now. You might be able to tell our folks something they don’t know.” He then answered their questions about such issues as flood control and Seven Oaks Dam before door prizes and other gifts were handed out during a random-name drawing.

Elsie Bation won an American flag. Now 79, the second-generation Japanese-American retired from the Real Estate Division. She began her federal service in 1956 in Chicago as a GS-3 before coming to Los Angeles. “I made a lot of good friends I still respect and communicate with,” she said. “The Corps of Engineers treated me royally and gave me a chance to rise from a 3 to 11—that’s pretty good, huh?” In retirement, if it can be called that, Elsie is learning how to play bridge, takes Spanish lessons, volunteers at a Japanese-American cultural center and is practicing her bonsai skills on miniature conifers. “I was almost too busy to come here,” she said.



Zayda Basco

Sidney Chriqui worked at the District 1967-1990, serving as Chief of Administration Services and Chief of IMO. Now living in Van Nuys, he also worked many years in the Mediterranean Division in Italy. From 1957-67 “we built practically half of Saudi Arabia,” he recalled. In 1979, he was dispatched to Israel from L.A. to work on two military projects being built there by the Israeli government. He fondly recalls “the quality of people we had on the team—the ambience we had, like a family, particularly overseas.”

Zayda Basco worked in Planning Division 1991-97 and remembered one date as special: “Sept. 13, 1997—that was my retirement party. The whole day we celebrated.” Since then the Filipina-American has helped log data for election ballots in downtown L.A. and is also active in Asian-American Pacific Islander groups.

Margaret Riordan Quinn, now a cheerful 90, retired in 1973 after serving as a secretary to the Chief of Maintenance Branch. She also had worked for the Corps since 1950 in Washington, D.C., and Springfield, Mo. She remembered bosses William S. Wainwright and Bill Smiddy as “very interesting men.” During her 23 years at L.A. District, “we went through a lot of floods and flood training.”

Bob Armogeda served in both the U.S. Army and the Air Force before landing in the L.A. Public Affairs office 1990-95. “Fred (-Otto Egeler, the current chief) was good to work for,” Armogeda recalled. “He came about a year before I retired, after I ran the office for about two and a half years.” Now retired at Lake Havasu, Ariz., Armogeda regaled listeners with tales of serving in Turkey during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and, earlier, during the Francis Gary Powers U-2 spy plane shoot-down incident which scuttled a summit between the U.S. and Soviet Union. “When President Eisenhower made the claim that there wasn’t a U-2 in Turkey, he was right,” said Armogeda. “There hadn’t been since 4 a.m. that day when the other U-2 taxied down the runway and took off for Greece.”

Other retirees who attended were Vance L. Carson, Mary Lou Grande, A.R. Mohageg, Dan Yee Gee, Ronald C. McDonald, Jack H. Hughes, Raymond Pensak, Emma

Chavez, Consuelo and Theodore Phillips, Mike Evasovic, Joan S. Bridwell, Richard F. Oddone, Alfonso Robles, Ronald Weiss and Jacob Young.



Margaret Riordan Quinn and Jack Hughes

The District Public Affairs Office maintains a list of some 400 District retirees and uses that list to issue annual invitations, distribute the Newcastle and for other mailings. If you see this story—and weren’t contacted about the retirees’ luncheon—please contact PAO at (213) 452-3921 or P.O. Box 532711, Los Angeles CA 90052-2325 or publicaffairs@spl.usace.army.mil.

Lack of U.S. health care a concern for retiree’s Rhodes Scholar daughter

Karen Matsuoka, daughter of Takuo Matsuoka (retired in 2001), recently earned an MPhil in Comparative Social Policy at Oxford University in England. Karen attended as a Rhodes Scholar.



She is continuing her education at Oxford pursuing a DPhil (the Oxford equivalent of the PhD) in Health Policy, focusing on health care allocation within the US health care system. After graduation she hopes to pursue a career in health policy analysis and advocacy, either in academia or at a non-partisan, non-profit think tank. The health policy issue that concerns her the most is the growing numbers of uninsured individuals in America and other such forms of health care inequalities.

District Real Estate division helps area military recruiting stations

By Mike Tharp
Photos by Greg Fuderer

One overlooks the Rose Bowl Parade route in Pasadena. The other sits in a two-tier Burbank mall anchored by such retail icons as Macy's, IKEA and Sears.

One sets its sights on health care professionals. The other seeks any qualified person who wants to join any of the four major military branches.

Both are new military recruiting stations, and both were nurtured into existence by the Los Angeles District's Real Estate Division. "We (the Corps) conduct all the leasing activities for all the armed forces," says Hector Angeles, chief of the Acquisition/Management & Disposal Branch in Real Estate. "DoD comes out with regular procedures for new offices or upgrades to existing facilities and we carry out the orders for the armed forces."

The Real Estate Division is DoD's executive agent for the Recruiting Facilities Program, the Homeowners Assistance Program and the Defense National Relocation Program. That includes appraisal, planning and control, acquisition, management and disposal of land – sort of a super realtor for America's soldiers, sailors, fliers and marines.

Here's how it works on the ground. The military branch decides on a location that meets its recruiting mission, based on a formula within the area it has established as its target market. Real Estate team members then check out the lay of the land and handle negotiations with property owners and leasers. They also compile and keep the paperwork.



Left to right—David Laurell, mayor of Burbank, Chris Chiavoni from Chrismar, Inc. (contractor on the project) and BG Bernardo C. Negrete in front of the Burbank center.

Like most real estate deals, recruiting stations are all about location, location, location. Ordinarily, Southern California recruiting stations have sprouted in strip malls because of their high traffic flow and accessibility. Lately, more are being placed in the sprawling



Storefront of the Burbank Recruiting Center in the Media City Center.

shopping malls that dot the suburban landscape—the better to showcase a station's profile. That's the case with the Burbank facility. A few are tailored specifically for a niche clientele—in Pasadena the station is in an office building, a venue designed to appeal to doctors, nurses, dentists and other health care professionals who may be interested in signing on with Uncle Sam. "The image there is a little different from that of the foot soldiers," explains Angeles.

As in most any landlord-tenant relationship, problems can arise. Some landlords object to the increased traffic around their property; others may not like it that a potential recruit may occupy a parking space in a strip mall lot longer than an ordinary retail customer. "Every landlord has his own idea of the ideal tenant," says Angeles.

The 13-year Corps veteran, who also served as a Navy corpsman 1978-82, thinks 9/11 has changed what happens at the recruiting stations his branch handles. "If anything, there's more eagerness," he says. "From what we hear, people are sometimes beating on their doors. In the past, they had to entice them with something special to reel them in."

During the grand opening ceremony at the Pasadena site, LTC John Cook, commander of the 6th Army Medical Dept. Recruiting Detachment, said the office "is connected to a larger strategy that will allow the Southern California Health Care Recruiting Company to better serve the health care market in the Los Angeles area." That unit, he continued, "recruits highly qualified and professional doctors, nurses, veterinarians, dentists, optometry-, medical services- and health science-trained experts for both the full-time Army and the U.S. Army Reserve."

One example: CPT Elizabeth M. Shin, a pediatric dentist in the L.A. area for more than eight years, became one of the station's first recruits as an Army Reserve Dental Corps officer. CPT Shin will be stationed with 18th Medi-

cal Company Dental Services in Stanton, Calif.

Due west of Pasadena, in beautiful downtown Burbank, senior military officers, civilian elected officials and private sector businesspeople attended the grand opening of that recruiting station. David Laurell, mayor of Burbank, called on Americans “to look to those who wear the uniform with pride.” BG Bernardo C. Negrete, deputy commanding general of the Army Recruiting Command, Fort Knox, Ky., observed that “the Army recruits quality, not volume, and this new station will have an impact on drawing on that quality.” He called it “a first-class operation.”

An estimated 450,000 people live within five miles of the mall, whose name will be changed late this year to Burbank Mall from Media City Center. The name change is part of a \$25 million renovation underway at the mall, so the recruiting station seems poised to capitalize on the revitalization project.

Back at L.A. District, Angeles takes an almost paternal pride in the Real Estate Directorate’s involvement in the recruiting process. “There’s a fervor of patriotism out there,” he says, “that has made this job a little easier—and hopefully that carries over to the future.”

CFC donations set new records

- **Donations: \$41,710.08—up 23 percent from last year and is a new record amount from the L.A. District.**
- **Donors: 257—up 16 percent from last year and is a new record number of donors from the L.A. District.**
- **Average donation: \$162— bests last year's average of \$154 and is a new record.**

Goals as laid out in the 2002 CFC PMP and the agency-improvement goals established by CFC for this year were topped as well.

What’s the best part of working for the Corps?



Benita Gross—

I like trying to learn and pick up everything people do. It’s a chance to pick up what IMO does at three different branches.



Charles Alexander—

My love is writing fiction. Working for the Corps gives me the time for it...being on the forefront of technology is exciting.

Josh Burnam—

It’s an opportunity to interact with the public. I like the level of independence vested in the project managers.



Sandra Villaneda—

I like the great people and the flexibility. It’s important as a parent to have that flexibility. It’s a pleasure to come here every day.



An ill wind blows some good:

District team helps Guam residents recover from summertime typhoon Chata'an

By Mike Tharp

The first time Tom Luzano visited Guam he was five years old, accompanying his family on a return trip to the Philippines. After the Pan American propeller plane landed, Luzano remembers the heat and humidity that drenched the U.S. territory.

The second time he visited Guam, Luzano was part of a five-member District team whose mission was to help the island recover after it was struck by the devastating winds, waves and rainfall from Typhoon Chata'an in July.

Luzano, a landscape architect for 28 years with the District, and Olufunke Ojuri, a 12-year civil engineer, recently were awarded the Achievement Medal for Civilian Service by the Department of the Army for "superior performance" during the relief operations. Ojuri served as Emergency Power Mission Specialist and Luzano an Emergency Power Logistics Specialist.

The other team members were given Certificates of Recognition: Maria Cisneros from Contracting, Girish Desai and Dorota Kwiecinski, both from Project Management. Each was "officially commended for dedicated efforts" during the response and recovery operations. Kwiecinski coordinated with FEMA in Oakland, while Henry Pham, now stationed in South Korea, also earned a Certificate of Recognition as part of the Power team.

All worked in support of the Honolulu District, Pacific Ocean Division and FEMA. Guam is 3,200 miles west of Hawaii.

Typhoon Chata'an slammed into Guam with 90-mile-an-hour winds and torrential rain after it had pounded Micronesia, where 37 people were killed and more than 100 injured. Up to 20 inches of rain in 24 hours were reported on the island of Chuuk in Micronesia, while 8 inches fell on Guam.

(A typhoon is a hurricane located west of the International Date Line. It gains typhoon status when its minimum sustained surface winds reach 74 mph (120 kph).)

There were no deaths or serious injuries reported on Guam, but all power was knocked out on the island. Nearly 3,000 people sought refuge in emergency shelters, and the President declared Guam a federal disaster area. In late August, FEMA said nearly \$51 million in recovery assistance had been provided to Guam.

The District team spent a month on Guam, working 12-hour days and seven-day weeks. The main mission was to procure generators to provide emergency power at sites designated by the Guamanian government. "Shelters, hospitals—whatever was needed to stay open," Ojuri re-



Cleaning the debris left from typhoon Chata'an.

calls. "When you'd go to the sites, you'd talk to the people you're providing service to. They were very warm, very happy to have us provide the service."

Luzano's job was "to make sure the contractor (a local Guamanian) got the generator out to the location where it was needed," he says. "When it was done, I'd get it back and make sure it was ready to do its job again. We had a list of maintenance procedures."

Ojuri worked mainly out of a mall, Luzano out of a hangar at sprawling Andersen Air Force Base. Their days routinely began at 6:30 a.m. and, although there were no more typhoon-level storms, sometimes-horizontal rains lashed the island. "I've never seen it rain so hard," Luzano says. "It came down in buckets, and you couldn't see in front of your face. There was no wind then, but just imagine a 160 mph wind behind it."

Both team members had previous emergency experience. Ojuri spent two weeks helping FEMA after the 1994 Northridge earthquake, and Luzano had worked at debris removal for Hurricane Fran in 1996 in North Carolina and roof replacement after Hurricane Georges ravaged Puerto Rico in 1998.

Guam “was a group effort,” Ojuri, born in the U.S. of Nigerian parents, says. “I enjoyed experiencing the diversity of the Corps. We worked closely with an Emergency Power Team from Honolulu District, and it was a good experience in teamwork, meeting other Corps folks, making new friends and networking—it was new for me and was very rewarding.”

By the time they left, electricity had been restored to 90 percent of the island. Another Corps team replaced them for 30 days to retrieve the generators and perform other missions.

A happy ending—at least until December 10.

That’s when an even more powerful storm—Super Typhoon Pongsona—hit Guam again. With gusts up to 184 mph and sustained winds of 150 mph, Pongsona was blamed for at least one death and wreaked havoc on an island only barely recovering from the July destruction. President Bush once more declared Guam a federal disaster area.

Luzano’s reaction? “I volunteered (to return),” he says. “I like that situation – helping out. Also, the Corps gave me a job to do and spent a lot of money training me.”

Giving back. The Chamorros, the native people of Guam, would recognize the motive. Their culture stresses as a central value, *Inafa’maolek*, which can be translated as “interdependence.” It’s clear from the contribution of L.A. District team members toward Guam’s recovery that their cooperative spirit can weather any storm.

Changing the way the Army fights wars

Nellis Air Force base will be the site of the Combat Air & Space Operations Center, also known as the Dynamic Battle Control Center (DBBC). A ground-breaking ceremony was held December 19.

The Los Angeles District will oversee construction of the more than \$8 million project.

The DBBC will facilitate command and

control war fighter training. The facility will support command control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance training, testing, experimentation and doctrine development.



From left to right: Ed Randol, EarthTech, senior vice president, (prime contractor); Stephen Browning, South Pacific Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, director, Military and Technical Services; COL Thomas Jeffcoat, director, Nellis Combined Air and Space Operations Center (customer); the Honorable Shelley Berkley, U.S. congresswoman; the Honorable John Ensign, United States senator; and MG Stephen Wood, commander, Air Warfare Center, Nellis AFB.

HO, HO, HO!

STARTING THE HOLIDAYS RIGHT



Top, right: Diana and her daddy, Darell Buxton, thread beads.

Top, left: Declan Hurley examines the nutcracker he won.

Right: Eric and Ashley Powell creating Christmas decorations.

Right: Happy faces all around the parachute.

Below: Jellybean the clown paints butterflies on one of Santa's visitors.



Photos By Kim Matthews



Top: COL Richard G. Thompson and Santa.

Left: Jonathan and mom Olga Jimenez working on a lanyard.

In Brief...Around LAD



Pete Gonzalez and Fred-Otto Egeler with some toys that were donated to Nuevo Amancer Latino Children's Services, an organization that helps abused children in foster care.

In Sympathy

Homer Halverson

When Homer retired in 1965 he was working in the channels section, later known as Section B.



He worked as a civil engineer on the Panama canal and later in Costa Rica where he worked on plans for the Pan American Highway. In 1944 he returned to Los Angeles, where he continued working for the Corps until he retired. His work with the Corps involved flood control for the Los Angeles basin.

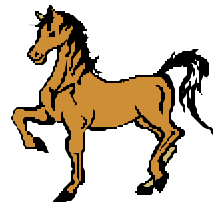
L. A. and all its history was dear to his heart. He knew every twist in the highway system and loved investigating any new areas. When the state bought property for the new San Fernando Valley State University he became involved with informing them of the history of the area, which included what had been the family farm.

Welcome to New Hires— as of November 21, 2002

Dodson, Victor	PPMD
Savage, Khristopher	Planning
Kayama, Tiffany	Planning
Kennedy, Timothy	Planning
Serjak, Christopher	Planning
Wu, Hong-Ye (Frank)	Engineering
Martin, MaLisa	Planning

A big "Thank you!" for Susan Tianen, Chief Safety Officer

Yesterday our community sponsored a horse ride through Hansen Dam, an area managed by the Army Corps which, as you may know, has been the subject of considerable public protest with regard to actions taken by the Army Corps as well as the LA Dept of Recreation and Parks, the flood basin's leasee. Susan Tianen joined us on this ride, and we are delighted to have an Army Corps contact who is intelligent and fun, very knowledgeable, an excellent communicator, and a skilled equestrian, to boot!



So, please know that we are very happy with Susan Tianen, and grateful to her for taking the time to join us on this ride. With the involvement of people like her from the Corps, we look forward to accomplishing great things, hopefully making the Hansen Dam basin a positive model for how a large recreational area can meet multiple user needs without compromising either flood control or environmental issues.

Thank you again,
Deb Baumann

Explaining reservoir regulations



Brian Tracy, Reservoir Regulations Branch, explains the operations of Corps dams to Jeff Pratt, deputy director for public works for Ventura county; Steve Bennett, Ventura County supervisor; and Sue Hughes, Ventura County government affairs.

Whitewater under blue skies

Colonel Thompson speaks with residents of the Sun City Palm Desert Community about the Whitewater River Basin project. Members of the project delivery team, including project manager, Jim Adams and sponsor representatives from the Coachella Valley Water District were also on hand.

For more information on the project, refer to the district's website at <http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/>



Team members drive hard to give hard drives to Indians

By Mike Tharp

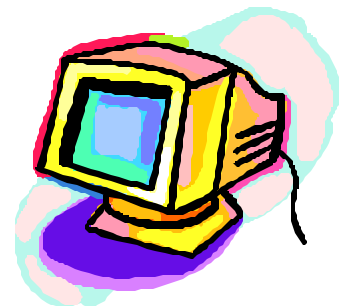
ARIZONA, NEW MEXICO—In what has become an annual expedition, District team members Glynn Alsup and Romano Caturegli have loaded their four-wheel-drive rigs and donated surplus computers to Indian nations in Arizona and New Mexico.

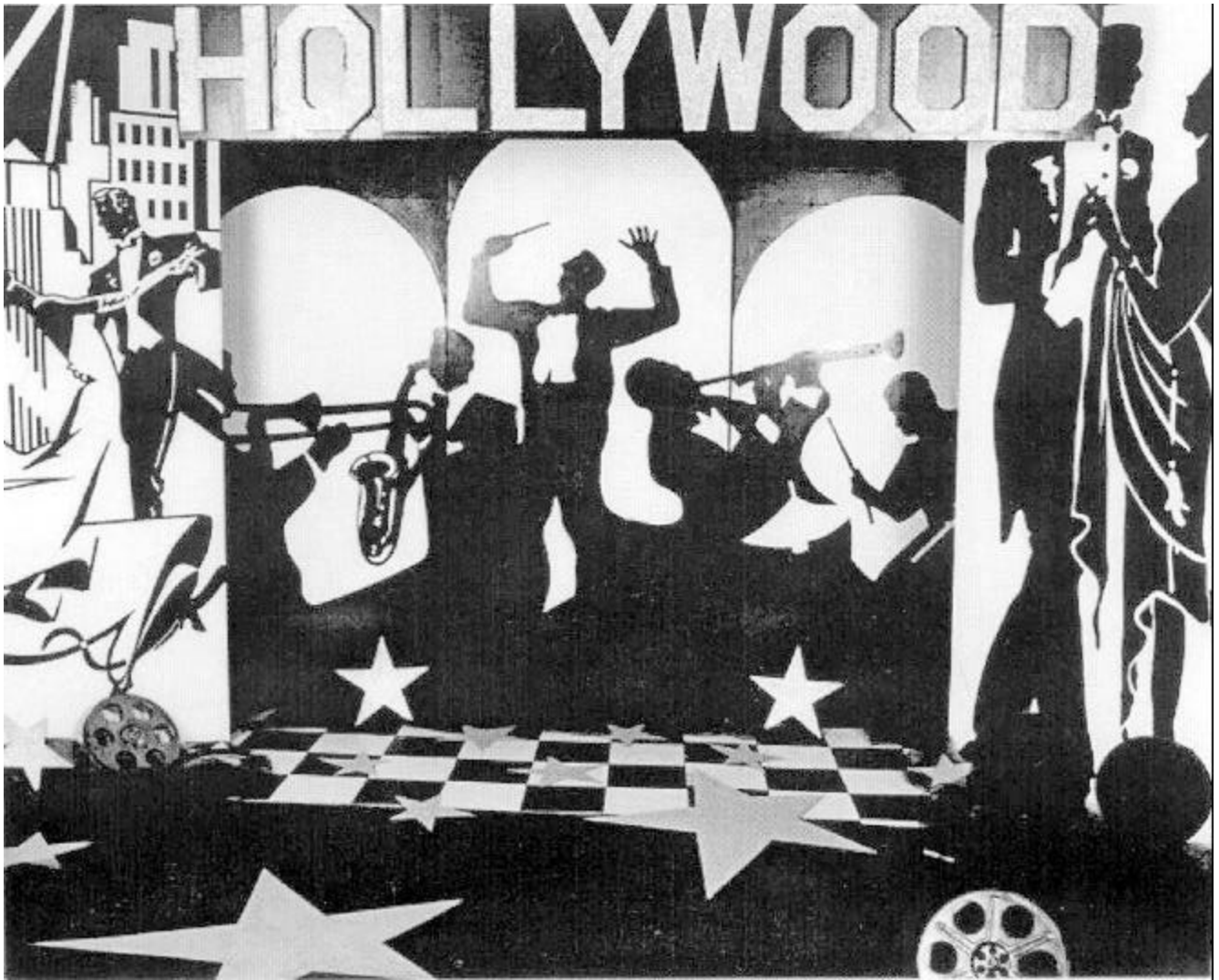


In October, Alsup, who has almost become an honorary Navajo for all the time he's spent on their reservation the past three years, delivered 54 excess computers to the Dine College Shiprock, N.M., campus.

In November, Logistics Management Office's Caturegli made two trips to Gila Bend, Ariz., where he dropped off 28 computers to the San Lucy District of the Tohono O'Odham Indian Nation.

The computers are used in schools and tribal offices by learners young and old alike.





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