



US Army Corps  
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New Orleans District

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# Riverside

Winter 2008



**The Dutch Connection**

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**Inside the IER Process**

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**NSPS Series**

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**Ready to Protect & Serve - Col. Alvin Lee**



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## Riverside

Winter 2008  
Vol. 20 No. 1

**Commander**  
Col. Alvin B. Lee

**Public Affairs Chief**  
Kathleen K. Gibbs

**Editor**  
Eric Hughes



**On the Cover:** New Orleans District Commander Col. Alvin B. Lee, July 2007. Photo by USACE.

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# All about dirt!



The Corps is searching for sources of borrow, or clay material, to improve the region's levee system known as the Hurricane Storm Damage Risk Reduction System. It is estimated that more than 100 million cubic yards of borrow will be needed to complete the 100-year level of protection over a five-parish area by June 2011. Earthen levee construction requires a specific type of clay material which compacts well and prevents seepage. Soil borings, testing and environmental clearance need to be completed before any borrow material is used for levee construction. A Sources Sought Announcement was issued this past December to determine how much borrow is locally available. (USACE Photo)

District employees donated personal and work-related items for the District Time Capsule. The plastic capsule was filled with numerous items, including issues of the Riverside. Employees donated items they thought would best represent them. The "burial" ceremony was held to commemorate Hurricane Katrina's second anniversary last Aug. 29 on the front lawn of the district's headquarters building. The capsule reopening, marked on the District Commander's Microsoft Outlook calendar, is set for Aug. 29, 2037. *Photo left to right: District Commander Col. Lee, Division Commander Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, Hurricane Protection Office's Maj. Nick Nazarko and Task Force Hope Director Karen Durham-Aguilera seal the capsule. (USACE Photo)*





# Mission Complete

*Louisiana Recovery Field Office deactivates after two years of hurricane response*

by Tom Clarkson

**A**mong an array of mind-boggling accomplishments - such as the effective removal of twenty-eight million cubic yards of hurricane created debris - the Louisiana Recovery Field Office (LA-RFO) of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been retired from service, deactivated.

In the official commemoration on Sept. 29, presided over by Col. Thomas Smith, Memphis District and LA-RFO commander, and Mike Smith, LA-RFO director, the termination of work was officially noted, its nearly 3,500 volunteers acknowledged and thanked, and - in military tradition - the organization's colors "cased", indicating the deactivation of the organization.

"Once there had been not even a single square foot of an eventual nine miles of temporary roofing installed. And, once there had been not one drop of an eventual forty million liters of water distributed to storm victims," noted Col. Smith. "Once there was only chaos."

Smith noted that an important role of the Louisiana Recovery Field Office, raised in the midst of the worst disaster scene in American history, was to create a foothold and provide an opening for the rest of the recovery effort. "Somebody had to start!" he said.

The Louisiana Recovery Field Office opened its doors in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, days after Katrina made landfall. The field office first began preparing to open roads in 40 parishes, saving lives, sustaining lives, and setting the stage for communities to manage their own recovery operations with power, temporary critical public facilities and schools, ice, water, Blue Roof repairs, and debris and demolition services.

From the outset, the Louisiana Recovery Field Office was

temporal, created for only one purpose - to productively help the citizens of Louisiana recover from the devastation and destruction of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the ensuing flood depredation. Normal Corps hurricane responses last about four months. The Katrina-Rita RFO response lasted 25 months.

The Corps' national response system poured about 3,500 of its worldwide workforce into South Louisiana to manage a \$5-billion recovery program. In a matter of days, the Louisiana Recovery Field Office set up the equivalent of a "provisional district office" in Baton Rouge and later advanced the entire operation forward to New Orleans.

By comparison, the Memphis District, which managed the LA-RFO, normally reports an annual work program of \$90 million.

Pursuant to the Federal Emergency Management Agency directive, September 29 was the last day in the life of an entity that has positively impacted thousands upon thousands of people. The organization, the team, the volunteers from around the world - for the most part - will leave Louisiana. Many are natives and victims and will continue the recovery process and their personal recovery.

"Thank you not only for your service," said FEMA Public Assistance Deputy Eddie Williams, "but also for the lessons you have shared with these communities. They are now better prepared to handle future responses because of those things you have taught them following Katrina and Rita."

With a backward glance, one may marvel at the enormity of work accomplished by this team, such as the installation of over 81,000 temporary roofs - enough to cover nine square miles.

**Mike Smith, right, Louisiana Recovery Field Office Director, passes the RFO colors back to Memphis District Commander Col. Tom Smith as the Corps deactivates its 25-month Louisiana recovery mission and returns residual mission elements to Memphis and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (Photo by Michael Logue)**





**“We have an enormous capacity of human spirit, and the Corps and FEMA will be there regardless of the scope or challenge.”**

**-- Col. Thomas Smith,  
Memphis District and LA-RFO  
Commander, on the nation  
responding to challenges.**

Or, the fact that during those first frantic days, they hauled in 2,178 truckloads of water at 18,000 liters each, as well as 1,533 truckloads of ice – the equivalent of 62,000 of those commercial ice machines seen at convenience stores.

With an eye to the children, they quickly constructed 216 school classrooms and 94 other critical public facilities such as fire and police stations.

And with sensitivity for the storm’s casualties and their families, team members built an 18,720-square-foot Victim Identification Center and mortuary which remains ready for further national emergencies.

Concern for the survivors led to the assessment of 1,217 sites and the effective monitoring of 65,000 FEMA trailers housing homeless Louisianans.

Literally in the citizenry’s back yards, they removed over 58,000 salt water killed trees and demolished over 7,000 storm-destroyed homes.

This work force of volunteers – comprised of full-time Corps employees, rehired annuitants, active duty and Reserve soldiers and contractors – peaked at a total of 1,700.

Here, simply, to work to help their fellow travelers of life, the LA-RFO departed with minimal fanfare. But they did so with the knowledge that, while much remains to be done, they did their part – and more.

“We have completed all the work that FEMA has asked of us. That is our mission,” said LA-RFO director Mike Smith. “We have brought these communities to a level of independence that allows them to finish their long-term recovery using local resources and funding from FEMA under the Project Work Sheet Program.”

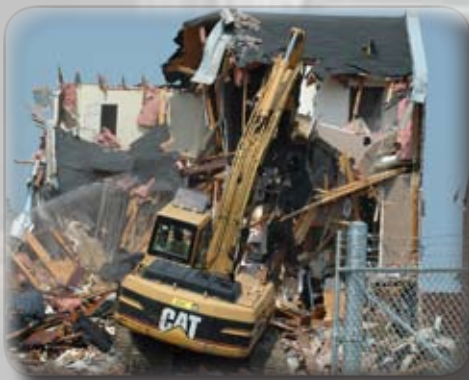
Col. Smith said the mission reinforced his faith in the nation to respond to similar challenges.

“I am optimistic about any challenge in this country anywhere in the future. We have an enormous capacity of human spirit, and the Corps and FEMA will be there regardless of the scope or challenge.”

For more information about the recovery operations of the Corps’ Louisiana Recovery Field Office as part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency response, visit [www.faceofthecorps.com](http://www.faceofthecorps.com).

## The Missions of the LA-RFO

Demolition



Debris  
Removal



Blue Roof



(USACE Photos)



# The Dutch Connection

*Corps and Dutch partnership seeks to enhance coastal Louisiana's flood protection system*

by Eric Hughes

In the face of adversity, it's always comforting to know there's someone who's been in your shoes. Like New Orleans, the Netherlands faced its own Katrina-like storm in January 1953 when a storm tide battered its coast, along with several neighboring European nations. With the rising flood waters, many had to be rescued from their rooftops. In its aftermath, an estimated 1,835 people were killed, and 70,000 were forced to evacuate.

The Dutch flood tragedy of 1953 evokes many similarities to the devastation left behind from Hurricane Katrina. Like New Orleans, the Netherlands is prone to frequent flooding due to being below sea level. In fact, the country's name, the "Nether" part means "low", or "Low lands."

Prior to the 1953 storm, the Netherlands' equivalent to the Corps of Engineers, the Rijkswaterstaat, was already conducting studies to formulate a flood protection system. After the 1953 storm, it was much more apparent that it was critical to build an ambitious flood defense system to protect the entire country from another devastating flood. Thus, Delta Works (Deltawerken) began to take shape.

Completed in 1997, the system was built to protect some parts of the country against a 10,000-year storm, depending on the areas deemed to be at greatest risk. The features include dams, sluices, locks, levees (also known as dikes) and storm surge barriers built to shorten the Dutch coastline and limit the number of levees needed to be heightened. Today the American Society of Civil Engineers considers the Dutch flood defense

system as one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World.

In Katrina's aftermath, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is now facing its biggest effort yet, and what could be considered the most unprecedented engineering design system ever – building a flood protection system to protect coastal Louisiana, including New Orleans, a major American city where 50% of the land lies below sea level.

Prior to the storm, the Corps already had partnered with the Dutch to study their flood defense system. In fact, the Corps and the Rijkswaterstaat established a Memorandum of Agreement, allowing each to share and exchange technical documents and other significant information. Since then, the Corps and the Dutch have been active in their ongoing support and partnership with numerous studies and reports.

"It's been a very good effort," said Al Naomi, Branch Chief with the district's Protection & Restoration Office, who has traveled to Holland twice in the last two years to meet with the Rijkswaterstaat. "The learning experience is pivotal and extremely useful for both the Netherlands and the Corps."

In response to Katrina, Congress directed the Corps' New Orleans District to compile a technical comprehensive hurricane risk reduction analysis and design, in partnership with the State of Louisiana. The final technical report, titled the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration (LACPR), is due to Congress in December 2007. The report is incorporating suggestions and best practices used from the Netherlands flood protection system by the Corps' hydromodeling team, comprised of engineers from both countries.



**(Left) The Hartel Barrier is part of the Europort Barrier in the Netherlands, which completes the Delta Project for the area of South Holland. The movable barrier consists of large elliptical gates suspended between oval towers. The water is held back by lowering the gates.**

**(Below) The Maeslant Barrier structure in the Netherlands automatically closes when needed. It is the largest moving structure on earth. A storm event on Nov. 8, 2007 closed the structure for the first time since being completed in 1997.**



*Background photo: The Easternscheldt Barrier, or the Oosterschelde, was the largest, most expensive part of the Delta works construction. The structure is considered to be "the eighth world wonder." The weir was constructed between 1976 and 1986. (Photos by Deltawerken)*



# Dutch students journey to New Orleans

Pieter Nordbeck, Jos Kuilboer, Roald Treffers, and Marten Hillen enjoyed the spirit of New Orleans, including the annual Jazz Fest Celebration in May. (Photo by Jos Kuilboer)



Four graduate students from Technical University Delft in the Netherlands took the initiative and contacted the Corps' New Orleans District for a chance at an internship. "We wanted to do a leading project in New Orleans where we really could make a difference," said Jos Kuilboer, one of the four students.

The internship opportunity became possible through the Dutch engineering firm, Royal Haskoning, which currently is assisting the Corps' Hydraulics Branch on hurricane protection studies.

"They were very enthusiastic," said Dr. Mathijs van Ledden, a Dutch engineer working with the Corps under Royal Haskoning. "I think it's very valuable for the Corps to have young students here for discussion and to do these kinds of things."

The students, majoring in hydraulics engineering, worked on an independent research project on the long term safety of New Orleans, focusing on a Mississippi River Diversion near Port Sulphur to improve the marsh lands. Already familiar in flood protection, the students said they found the major difference with their studies was the presence of hurricanes, which are not found in the Netherlands.

Their efforts required additional research on coastal Louisiana. During their project, they combined all kinds of different methods, including lab experiments at the Louisiana



Dutch student, Roald Treffers, explained the group's final conclusions on their Mississippi River Diversion findings during a presentation to Corps project managers.

(Photo by Nancy Mayberry)

State University (LSU), numerical experiments with a numerical model, and meetings with different people to discuss the various details of river diversions.

The conclusion of their project indicated a larger diversion is required to keep up with sea level rise to help restore the marshes on a larger scale. Those findings were presented at the end of their internship to numerous project managers at the New Orleans District.

The partnership's knowledge exchange is working in two-fold as well. A team of Dutch engineers with Delft Hydraulics is currently also preparing a study on their perspective of hurricane protection issues along coastal Louisiana. The report is expected within a few months.

Despite the many similarities, Naomi said the process of taking the Dutch's system and modeling it to fit the Corps' system for coastal Louisiana is not as simple as it sounds, noting there are differences.

"You just can not take a solution that works in the Netherlands and assume it's going to work here in coastal Louisiana," said Naomi. "Hurricane storm surges are a different animal than the North Sea storms that they face. It's really hard to draw a direct comparison. For example, meteorological,

hydrologic and geologic factors are quite different. You have to adapt those plans based on changes on those conditions. Certainly there are ways of approaching problems as it applies to risk and reliability and designing on soft soil that we can share with each other, but everything is unique."

Dr. Mathijs van Ledden, a Dutch contract engineer working under Royal Haskoning with the district's Hydraulics Branch, agreed with Naomi on the extent of imitating the Dutch system to fit coastal Louisiana. "You can't just copy and paste," said Van Ledden. "You can use the good elements and ideas from it, but Louisiana has to model its own flood protection system."

see Dutch, page 17



COVER STORY

A photograph showing two men holding a red ribbon together. The man on the left is wearing a grey suit, and the man on the right is wearing a military uniform. They are standing in front of a building with a large window. The title 'PREPARED & READY' is overlaid on the image in a large, serif font.

# PREPARED & READY

NEW DISTRICT COMMANDER, COL. ALVIN LEE  
TAKES ON THE MANY CHALLENGES TO PROTECT  
COASTAL LOUISIANA

BY ERIC HUGHES





There's something about Lee - Col. Alvin "Al" Lee that is. He's made it no secret that he's the new kid on the block, an obvious indication he's here to learn and is ready for the many heavy challenges facing a post-Katrina New Orleans District. After assuming command as the 60th District Engineer last July, Lee has taken on the role with a mighty and confident grip.

Being the first District Commander in a post-Katrina New Orleans, Lee is encountering the exact opposite of what the previous commander, Colonel Richard Wagenaar, faced a month before Katrina. Pre-Katrina, the New Orleans District faced funding cutoffs on projects and additional hiring. Today there is much to accomplish. Lee is responsible for appropriations exceeding \$7 billion for hurricane restoration, along with continuing the district's navigation, coastal restoration and flood control missions.

### PREPARING FOR THE CHALLENGE

In his few first months as District Commander, Lee's been on a non-stop tour to grasp as much information necessary for the job. "I have done more in the first 60 days here than my entire previous assignment," Lee said during his first town hall event. With the intensity of work going on and yet to be faced, Lee sees the district moving away from an emergency mode and continuing to make everyday progress.

"The district is still very engaged in what they are doing. I believe that the intensity level is still very high," said Lee, who closely parallels the intensity to what is being done in Afghanistan.

Lee credits his previous Corps assignments for preparing him for his current challenge. He's done tour of duties throughout the world, including with the Afghanistan Engineering District for the Global War on Terrorism. His most recent assignment was as a fellow in the Secretary of Defense Corporate Fellows Program, assigned to Caterpillar Inc. in Peoria, Illinois.

His role as district commander is one he's familiar with as well. Lee previously held that role for the Charleston District in

South Carolina, along with lessor assignments in the Alaska and Omaha Districts.

"Each one of those assignments gives you a unique perspective on different programs, different cultures of the Corps and how they interact," said Lee, who's served in the Army for 22 years and is a distinguished military graduate of Georgia Southern University. He received his master's in Engineering Management from St. Martins University.

### PROGRESS AND THE CITY

Since Katrina, the world is watching the district's every action and progress much closer. Lee intends to keep the progress moving ahead, and through action, he hopes to recapture and exceed the public's confidence in the Corps' work.

Lee notes there have been many accomplishments and much progress made prior to his arrival, and there are many more milestones to meet in this unique and historic opportunity. "The city is better protected today than when Katrina hit. The Corps has safety features in place to help us reduce risk," said Lee, explaining such examples of strengthening and raising levees around the area and placing emphasis on new features such as T-wall designs, storm surge data, armoring, the interim floodgates at the city's three outfall canals (17th St., London Ave. and Orleans Ave.), and identifying risk in different areas of the city.

"What we have done to date in risk communication with the release of the flood maps is exactly what needed to occur. We communicated to the public that there is still residual risk throughout the city," said Lee. "As we continue to build towards the 100-year levels of protection for the Hurricane Storm Damage Reduction System, the Corps is ensuring more protection with less risk. This monumental effort will allow people of this city to continue to rebuild and feel assured that they'll have a certain level of protection, while understanding there are some areas throughout the city with residual risk. The 2011 flood maps clearly show the effects of our work in reducing flooding throughout the Greater New Orleans area."

*see Lee, next page*

**(Left) Deputy Ed Watford passes the flag to new district commander, Col. Alvin Lee at the Change of Command Ceremony on July 20, as former district commander, Col. Wagenaar and MVD Commanding Brigadier General Robert Crear stand watching. (Photo by Anne Marino)**

**(Right) Talking to the media is just part of being the district commander post-Katrina. On Sept. 7, Lee was interviewed by WWL-TV Reporter Bill Capo about the St. Charles Parish groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the start of construction on the final levee lift along the east bank of the Mississippi River.**

*(Photo by Scott Riecke)*





Lee, previous page

### PEOPLE ARE KEY

Rebuilding confidence in the Corps is an issue Col. Lee is already establishing by building relationships and enhancing the professional cooperation with numerous stakeholders, including key individuals with the State of Louisiana, congressional members at the state and federal levels, parish presidents, sewerage and water boards, levee districts and authorities throughout coastal Louisiana.

“It is a great opportunity to understand the dynamic of the region. [Meeting people] helps me understand the importance of the work here and how it relates to the needs of the community – not just in New Orleans, but the areas in southern Louisiana as well,” said Lee. “I have met with key stakeholders and the public to understand their issues and the challenges they have and how the Corps can help bring solutions to their issues and concerns.”

Internally, Lee has made some strides with embracing the needs of district employees and with communicating as frequently as possible. “My key area is really focusing on people,” said Lee. “People are the key for us getting the job done, accomplishing our mission, and building and sustaining morale.”



According to Lee (shown here at the Change of Command), he did more in his first 60 days as District Commander than in his entire previous two-year assignment.

*(Photo by Scott Riecke)*

In fact, in his first few days as commander, Lee provided information about characteristics he values in each employee by sending a personal and down-to-earth memorandum to all employees via electronic mail. For his first town hall ceremony on September 28, Lee once again communicated details on his initial observations and key missions for the district.

Lee is aware there are personnel issues to tackle, including the long hours and stress faced from the post-Katrina work environment. Some of those challenges are due to numerous vacancies needing to be filled.

“I am trying to gain an understanding of what I can do as a commander to influence how we do the work, how we bring on additional resources to do the work and how we balance it out so we don’t have people burning out,” said Lee, who already is enforcing safety as a key priority for current and incoming employees, along with working with MVD and Corps headquarters to request direct hiring authority and to reevaluate the locality pay for our district employees in the Greater New Orleans area.

### SPORTSMAN’S PARADISE

Coming to New Orleans was indeed a welcome change from the cold winters of Peoria, Illinois for both Lee and his wife, Dee, who have two children and a granddaughter.

“We love New Orleans. There is no shortage of things to do here. The food and the people are great,” said Lee. “You can walk up to anyone and they talk to you. New Orleans is unique in that way.”

Lee was born and raised in the small town of Waycross, located in the heart of Southeast Georgia, known for its vast railroad systems and its 450,000-acre national wildlife refuge, Okefenokee Swamp. His southern roots made New Orleans a perfect fit when it came to southern hospitality and charm, and unfortunately, the weather.

“It’s a beautiful place. It’s good, hot and humid,” said Lee, comparing his hometown to his new home. “It’s got a lot of bugs and critters crawling around as well. So I am pretty comfortable to the environment, but I’m not sure you can ever get used to the humidity.”

Despite the damp weather, swamps are nothing new to Lee. In fact, coastal Louisiana’s vast recreation and wetlands are his ideal ‘Sportsman’s Paradise.’ As an avid outdoorsman, Lee does his fair share of hunting, fishing, golfing and keeping fit. “I truly enjoy the outdoors. I try to take every opportunity to go out and enjoy nature and see the beauty of God’s creation,” said Lee, who already spent time duck hunting in the Atchafalaya Basin. “It’s right at home for me.”

Upon their arrival, Lee and his wife, along with their daughter and granddaughter, settled in the northshore area of Mandeville, La., and quickly assimilated into the community. He credits his smooth transition and adjustment into the community to his faith and their new church family and the same southern hospitality he’s experienced throughout the south.

“I’ve had the same experience with people here at the district and people outside the district with local leaders, private citizens and different groups of people. They are very inclusive, want to help you succeed and bring you into the fold. I’ve been very appreciative of that.”



# INNOVATIONS FROM DEVASTATION

*Linda LaBure named 2007 Real Estate Professional*

by **Dave Mack**

It's become a cliché because it's so true: Katrina changed everything. That realization struck Linda LaBure while she was still in Vicksburg waiting out the storm. The New Orleans District Real Estate Chief did not yet know the extent of the devastation that had been visited upon Corps facilities, but she did know there would be no more business as usual.

Over the next 24 months, LaBure and her team practically rewrote the real estate rulebook for the district. In recognition of her exemplary performance and innovation, LaBure was recently named 2007 Real Estate Professional of the Year for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"I look at the award as acknowledgement of the entire New Orleans District Real Estate team's efforts since Katrina," said LaBure. "I'm amazed that with all the personal and professional challenges my staff was facing, we accomplished some pretty extraordinary things."

To wit, they:

- \* Developed creative approaches to several Uniform Relocation assistance issues unique to Hurricane Katrina landowners;
- \* Pioneered the multi-services contract approach to help manage the heavy acquisition workload as a result of the storm; and
- \* Established effective working relationships with numerous stakeholders, associations and representatives involved in the hurricane effort.



**Real Estate Chief Linda LaBure (left) with one of her team members, Elaine Comeaux.**

*(USACE Photo)*

And that's only a partial list.

The over-arching post-Katrina mission for LaBure and company, a team of more than 40 professionals, was – and continues to be – to secure the real estate interests needed for the repair, rehabilitation and completion of the hurricane protection system. If you're going to install pumps and floodgates and build levees, you need land to put them on. If you're going to excavate borrow, you need a source.

To accomplish those tasks, LaBure and her team had to innovate. In the area of Uniform Relocation Assistance, owner/occupants are required to reside on the property to be eligible for relocation assistance. The expanded application of "constructive residential occupancy" in the areas needed for repair and rehabilitation of the hurricane protection system allowed relocation assistance benefits for owners who would have been living on their property had the storm not made it uninhabitable. Availability of land for construction was accelerated working with the state, parishes and the City of New Orleans which "commandeered necessary use of rights-of-way," a term not heard before Katrina.

*see LaBure, page 16*

## NATIONAL RECOGNITION

The following employees received notable recognitions in the past year:

### **USACE 2007 Real Estate Professional of the Year Award**

Linda LaBure

### **2007 Armed Forces Civilian Service Medal**

Skip Jacobs, for work with LA-RFO as a logistics specialist

### **USACE 2007 Black Engineer of the Year Award**

Gary Hawkins, Outstanding Professional Development

### **USACE 2007 Black Engineer of the Year Award**

Richard Butler, Outstanding Technical Contribution in Government

### **2007 Keystone Award for paralegals**

Fred Wallace

### **2006 National Responder of the Year Award**

Mike Park, as the New Orleans District Responder and LA RFO Director for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

### **FY06 Resource Management Award in Comptroller**

Richard Flores

### **FY06 Resource Management Award in Deputy Comptroller**

Carol Joseph

### **MVD Construction Representative of the Year**

Duke Ducarpe

### **MVD Hard Hat of the Year**

Randy Persica



# A SALUTE TO YOU...

*Honoring and recognizing the achievements of teams and individuals*

by Amanda Jones and Eric Hughes

Saluting and honoring employees' hard work shows how much an organization appreciates its employees. On September 28, 2007, the district's Quarterly Awards Ceremony presented six team awards and six special recognition awards. In addition, two former district employees were inducted into the Distinguished Gallery. Four employees were also recognized for their length of service.

The New Orleans District is a workforce that goes above and beyond to get projects running, a workforce that has dedicated time and service by responding to the growing needs of our community and our nation.

Each employee is recognized for continuing to uphold the New Orleans District mission of providing comprehensive water resources management to include navigation, flood, hurricane and storm damage reduction and environmental stewardship for South Louisiana to ensure public safety and to benefit the nation.

The collective creative capabilities continuously overcome obstacles and allow successful mission completion. Whether you're a technical engineer, program analyst or a park ranger, we're all working the same mission together. Therefore, as you read this, give yourself and your teammate a pat on the back for a job well done.

## Team Awards

The **IHNC Lock Gate Repair Team** (photo below) consisted of lock personnel and skilled laborers from Operation Division's shops section. The team diagnosed a problem when one of the strut arms of the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) gate become inoperable; thus shutting down navigation on this critical juncture on Friday evening, Aug. 10, 2007.

As navigation stacked up waiting to go through the lock, this team worked tirelessly and safely in weather where the heat index neared 110 degrees to restore gate operability as rapidly as possible. The team worked throughout the weekend and had the gate back in operation within about 48 hours.

The **IHNC Lock Gate Repair Team** members receiving a certificate from Col. Lee (left to right): Col. Lee, Bruce Breaux, Larry Trout, Victor Landry, Amilcar Gonzales, Ocie Williams, Phillip Melerine. (Not pictured: Timothy Hart, Phillip Hawes, Raymond Williams, Reginald Reese, David Doucet, Carl Robinson and Richard McKinzie.)

*(Photo by Anne Marino)*



The **Tree Removal Project Delivery Team** worked diligently and professionally under intense public and media scrutiny to improve the safety of the hurricane protection levees and floodwalls in the New Orleans metropolitan area. They worked through a host of problems with attention to detail, all the while maintaining a sense of urgency.

The team developed an effective communication strategy that ensured cooperation and input from all interested parties, including project sponsors, affected landowners, civic associations, tree experts, elected officials, the media and others. The team also developed GIS databases of property ownership, tree and other encroachments, and contact information for private property owners adjacent to the outfall canals. This team is commended for its perseverance to implement Corps guidance on vegetation near levees to ensure the safety of our protection systems.

*Team members: Michael Stout, Steve Finnegan, Richard Radford, Maurya Kilroy, Huey "Joey" Marceaux, John Hall, Melissa Koehn, Amy Powell, Frank Vojkovich, Noel Grego, John Defraites*

The **Company Canal Contract Acquisition Team** was commended for their hard work in acquiring a critical contract award to ensure closure of the Company Canal in Westwego in the event of a hurricane or coastal storm.

After the floodwalls along the canal were declared an imminent threat by the Corps on April 16, 2007, the interdisciplinary team was formed to develop plans and specs and award a contract as soon as possible to correct the situation. An analysis of new soil borings showed soil strengths were much lower than originally calculated. The walls were the most vulnerable reach of the West Bank & Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project.

The team was successful in expediting the process. Thus, a contract was awarded for \$14.7 million on May 19, 2007, just one month after the imminent threat declaration was signed.

*Team members: Stuart Waits, Gary Brouse, Cynthia Cruse, Ed Usner, Mark Gonski, David Lovette, Carl Balint, Ulysses Hester, Richard Butler, Larry Dressler, Chris Monnerjahn, Gina Foley,*



*Andy Studdard, Aline Smith, Ione Cataldo, Tom Murphy, Pam Michel, Rob Thomson, Gib Owen*

The **MRGO Deep Draft De-authorization Study Team**, known as the MRGO-3D Team, was commended for its professionalism, implementation of strategies to leverage its resources and expedite the study plan, and its collaboration with stakeholders and the public.

The team was tasked with preparing a comprehensive plan to de-authorize the federal MRGO deep draft navigation channel project. Their direction required development of an interim report in only six months and completion by December 2007.

The team worked with other Corps districts in Galveston and Mobile to leverage its resources and embrace a non-traditional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance strategy that involved preparation of a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) – a first use of this approach within the Corps. The approach allowed for expeditious completion of the draft LEIS in just three months and placed the team on track to finalize the NEPA report in just eight months.

*Team members: Rick Broussard, Keith O’Cain, Sue Hawes, Sean Mickal, Mark Haab, Julie Morgan, Mayley Boyce, Michelle Daigle, Judith Guitierrez, Stacey Madden, Gregory Miller, George Alcalá, Diana Laird, Robert Heiny, Angie Minton, Lisa Wadsworth, Kelly Stoll*

The **Geotech Branch Soil Boring, Testing & Quality Assurance Team** was commended for its expeditious data collection and testing, which will provide the necessary design criteria for 100-year flood protection.

This team was responsible for the coordination and organization, along with quality assurance for the field investigations and data collection of four large task orders for a joint venture geotechnical contract. The task orders covered field investigations in four general vicinities, including Westwego to Harvey Canal, Lake Cataouatche, Jefferson Parish East Bank, and Algiers Canal.

The amount of data collected within the time frame was unprecedented. Field investigation and lab tests were required for the Corps of Engineers to meet its goal of providing 100-year flood protection to New Orleans by 2011. A total of 675 cone penetrometer tests (CPT) for approximately 49,500 feet and 600 soil borings for approximately 45,000 feet have been performed. Over 12,000 lab tests have been completed to date. Detailed testing on this foundation material was approximately 90 percent complete at the time.

*Team members: Brian Bonanno, Louis “Del” Britsch, Kim Tullier, Robert Brooks, Ian Callahan, Richard Pinner, Shung Kwok Chiu, Larry Dressler, Thomas Waguespack, Madonna Montz, Chad Rachel, Rusty Penley, Dana Ray, Earl Sanders, Cecil Crosby*

The **Harvey Floodgate Temporary Pump Structure Team** developed a plan to install temporary pumps on the Harvey floodgate structure to replicate the pumping capacity of the Harvey pump station by August 2007, while not interrupting permanent construction at the Cousins pumps station.

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall August 29, 2005, the West Bank and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project was about 40 percent complete, leaving more than one quarter of a million residents and businesses at risk from moderate storms. An important project component, the navigable Harvey Canal floodgate, will protect the upper portions of Jefferson Parish along

the Harvey Canal from flooding associated with hurricane surges.

A plan was developed to accelerate the completion of the Harvey floodgate and the Cousins discharge channel floodwall, to affect closure across the Harvey Canal by August 2007, thus providing hurricane protection during the most active part of the 2007 hurricane season and the entire 2008 season. There were consequences to advancing the construction because the Harvey pump station would not be operable when the floodgate was closed.

The plan provided just over 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) of pumping capacity through the use of seven hydraulically driven pumps. This capacity, combined with storage between the Harvey pump station and Harvey floodgate, allowed the Harvey pump station to continue to evacuate rainfall runoff during a hurricane when the Harvey floodgate was closed to protect against the hurricane storm surge.

*Team members: Julie Vignes, Michael Stack, Mark Gonski, Mike Sanchez, Stephen Knox, Rachael Tranchina, Paulette Phillips, Ione Cataldo, Cindy Nicholas, Kelly Gele, Diane Taylor, Brenda Welty, Kenny Crumholt, Lary Yorke, Todd Jacquet, Joseph Camarillo, Steve Conravey, Thomas Murphy*

#### **Special Recognition Awards**

- *Shea Sennett, Alison Hebert and Emile “Skip” Jacobs* for their efforts, dedication and perseverance displayed in touring the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, the American Council of Engineers Companies and many others as members of the district’s Joint Visitors Bureau.

- *Gerald Collins, David Perry, Conrad Smith, Roy Piernas, Jason Bettisworth, Shea Sennett, and Stephen Stone* for their contributions and services provided during the Mississippi River Low Water Trip, Aug. 22 – 24, 2007.

- *Kathy Gibbs and Amanda Jones* recognized for their professionalism, participation and support of the Federal Executive Board’s Public Service Recognition Week activities May 7 - 11, 2007.

#### **- Governor Kathleen B. Blanco Award:**

*Juanita Russell* recognized for her work on the historic completion of Louisiana’s Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast.

#### **- Commander’s Award for Civilian Service**

*Michael Maples* recognized for his participation on the prolonged effort for the IM/IT A-76 Most Efficient Organization Team proposal.

**Chief Counsel’s Team Award:** Seventeen members of Office of Counsel recognized for their outstanding service to the nation during the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort.

*Team members: Diane Bilbo, Stephen Bland, Cerio DiMarco, Angela Drinkwitz, Kelly Dunn, Denise Frederick, Daryl Glorioso, Maurya Kilroy, Mary Kinsey, Kathleen Klein, Bill Meiners, Randall Merchant, Bob Northey, Marco Rosamano, Alan Schulz, Michele Stiebing, Fred Wallace*

#### **35-Year Length of Service Recipients**

Debra Blood (RE), Sue Hawes (PM), Michael Maples (EX), Cheryl Weber (CPAC)



# NSPS SERIES

## NSPS transition process in high gear

by Rich Flores, NSPS transition manager

The district's NSPS transition process moved ahead at a quick pace during 2007, and 2008 will continue to progress at the same speed. So far, the district has trained NSPS to more than 500 employees, and the first real pay pool has been conducted. Approximately 140 are currently in the system. Another 450 employees will spiral into NSPS in early 2008. The transition will eventually create the next big task in the process: developing performance objectives. Before moving forward, here is an overview on how the district's NSPS pay pool process developed.

### The Pay Pool Process

The pay pool process began in September 2007 when the first 121 employees were asked to write a self assessment of their accomplishments. The supervisor or rater wrote their assessment of the employee's accomplishments, which was a challenging and time consuming task. Fortunately supervisors met the challenge by submitting their assessments, recommended ratings, shares and payout distributions timely. The higher level review (HLR) acting as a quality control point in the evaluation process, would review the supervisor assessments and if necessary return to the rating official for correction. With these actions accomplished, the pay pool panel would convene to review all the submissions to conclude the evaluation process.

The district's pay pool panel convened during Oct. 26 and Nov. 2, 2007. District Commander, Col. Alvin Lee was the pay pool manager. His pay pool consisted of the deputy district engineer, Lt. Col. Murray Starkel, and the chiefs of Construction, Engineering, Program Management, Real Estate, Operations, Resource Management and a representative

of the Hurricane Protection Office. Col. Lee also had two administrative support individuals and observers from the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) and the Office of Counsel.

The entire week's pay pool process was intense, challenging and long. Blackberries were even banned to allow members to concentrate on the pool's agenda.

During the process, the pool members initially evaluated 10 percent of the performance plans as a group to ensure everyone had a common understanding of the process and to establish a rating baseline before breaking into groups to complete all of the evaluations.

Evaluations were done in detail by each objective. The review provided an early indication of the largest challenge to face the pay pool panel: the recommended rating and the supervisor's assessment were not always in agreement. The written assessment is critical with the pay pool and carries a lot of weight. When all is done, the rating and the written evaluation need to be in agreement.

After the initial 10 percent review, the panel broke into two groups to evaluate all the ratings. The panel was divided so that no panel member was involved in the initial review of their work section. This was to allow the evaluation to stand on its own, without a work section representative speaking for the employee. Every evaluation received the same attention from the pay pool panel. Evaluations were only put aside and considered done when the group felt the recommended rating and written evaluation were in agreement. Evaluations were returned to the rater when the group felt the recommended rating and written evaluation were not in agreement. Returned evaluations were to be given top priority by the rating official for correction, change and clarification. While most evaluations were returned because the recommended rating seemed high, many were returned because the rating appeared low.

Returned evaluations were reviewed by the entire pay pool panel. Every panel member voted on the revised evaluation. Many were considered complete, but some still were in disagreement between the recommended rating and the written evaluation. At this point, the pay pool panel is free to change a rating to what the evaluation justifies – which did not occur. Instead, each panel member was given the opportunity to advocate for any rating in disagreement or any employee being evaluated by the pool. The panel, with the exception of the advocate, would vote; that vote was almost final.

Col. Lee added two more steps to the process. He asked each division or office chief to "rack-and-stack" their employees. For example, did they feel their employees were fairly ranked based on their value to the organization? He personally asked each

### Did You Know?

#### NSPS Law Change

Congress changed a significant part of the NSPS law in the National Defense Appropriation Act. The revision requires the Department of Defense to set aside 60 percent of any congressional pay raise (after locality pay or local market supplement is removed) to adjust the bottom of the pay band rate range. The remaining 40 percent may be used at DOD discretion to adjust the pay band rate range or to be applied to the pay pool. In 2008, DOD applied the full congressional pay raise to the top of the pay band rate range.



## Tracking an employee's accomplishments

Accomplishment in FY08			
Obj #	Date	Task, Action, Accomplishment	Effected Whom

Supervisors should keep a record of each employee's accomplishments over the year. A spreadsheet can be created to simply record the date, task, action and accomplishment and the benefit. It is recommended to limit the task and action/accomplishment block to one sentence.

panel member if they believed any employee was inappropriately rated and gave them one more chance to state their case.

When the advocate was successful in stating a case, the information was recorded and the rating official had to make appropriate changes to the official evaluation. The written justification had to support the final rating. If the advocate was not successful, the rating was changed to what the rater's assessment supported.

The pay poll results included a total of 116 employees with the average rating of 3.46. The ratings were on a scale of one to five. A rating of one was considered poor compared to a five rating, an exceptional rating.

The entire pay pool panel process provided the following lessons learned:

- **Improve performance objectives.** These need to be well written in the "SMART" framework. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable Aligned Realistic/Relevant and Timed. (see insert box)

- **Improve self-assessments.** Overall the assessments were acceptable. However, they could be improved by keeping a record of events that occur over the year. It can be as simple as a spreadsheet; recording the date, task, accomplishment and benefit for every significant action. Each entry should be no more than one sentence.

- **Improve supervisor assessments.** These are the most important pieces in the NSPS evaluation process. Supervisors need to keep a record of what each of their employees accomplish over the year. The same simple record described for self assessments will work for the supervisors. Every supervisor should also evaluate the recommended ratings they write. They need to pull out the applicable performance indicator and make a critical evaluation of their recommended rating and the employee assessment. Based on what they wrote, not what they know, they need to ask themselves this question: If I was evaluating this individual, and using the supervisor's assessment and performance indicator, how would I

rate the employee? Based on the answer, a supervisor should do one of the following: (1) submit the evaluation, (2) improve the assessment, or (3) change the recommended rating.

- **Strengthen the HLR action with objectives and assessments.** The HLR has a bird's eye view of the entire process. They know the employee, the rater and are involved in the establishment of the job objective. The HLR must ensure the objectives are good and the assessment support the rating. Most corrective action should occur at the HLR level.

- **Streamline the pay pool process, but keep the fair and unbiased review of every employee's performance.** When the mock pay pools are done in 2008, the district will have the opportunity to test several different courses of action. The results will hopefully build a better model for the 2008 pay pool.

### The New NSPS Transition

This February about 500 non-bargaining personnel will spiral into NSPS. This will bring the number of New Orleans District employees in NSPS to approximately 600.

#### Training

The first step will require getting everyone familiar with NSPS. There will be a mandatory on-line training followed by class room training. Both will need to be completed before February 2008. For further NSPS training, employees can go to <http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/training.html>. The site includes an iSuccess training course on writing performance objectives and self assessments.

The New Orleans District has also developed its own course on writing self-assessments. This course will be offered soon after the next NSPS transition.

Additionally, the Department of Defense (DOD) is also developing a pay pool training course for non-supervisors. The course does not have a release date, but it's expected to be an

see NSPS, page 16



*NSPS, from page 15*

on-site training lasting about four hours. If DOD does not complete the course, the district will develop a course for non-supervisors along the lines of the "Pay Pool for Supervisors" course, which explains the entire NSPS operation.

*Getting all the pieces in place*

The following will need to take place to fulfill the NSPS transition:

1. Performance objectives for all employees need to be established and entered into the automated NSPS performance appraisal application (PAA) tool. These need to be in the system within 30 days after the cycle begins. For employees transitioning into NSPS, the cycle start date is Feb. 17.
2. Inform all NSPS personnel who is in their pay pool, who is their pay pool manager and the make up of the pay pool panel. Employees must be notified within 90 days of the start of the rating cycle.
3. Interim reviews will be conducted between April and May based on when the employee's NSPS cycle began. Therefore, setting an early date for the self-assessment training is imperative. The course is short and highly recommended. An employee will hopefully use what they learn in the class to write a better self assessment for their interim review. The interim review is mandatory on the part of supervisors and will be tracked.
4. With 450 people transitioning into NSPS in February, the district is going to have many more pay pools for fall 2008. One of the best training tools for the pay pool panel is running a mock pay pool utilizing real data – obtained from the interim reviews. This tool allows the pay pool panel the opportunity to learn and use the business rules and see how the evaluation process works. Both employees and supervisors get a chance to write self- or employee assessments. Most importantly, the mock pay pool allows employees and supervisors to receive feedback on how well they wrote their assessments. This

training tool is expected to make the real pay pool better.

Indeed, the change to NSPS has offered a challenge to the district's personnel. The goal of this program is to reward employees in proportion to their performance. Through teamwork, commitment to the integrity of the process and hard work, the district successfully cleared the first NSPS spiral. Future spirals will be successfully accomplished as well.

**What are SMART Objectives?**

- **S - Specific** means that an observable action, behavior, or achievement is described. It also can mean that the work relates to a rate of performance, frequency, percentage, or other number. The job objective should be specific about the result, not the way it is achieved.
- **M - Measurable** (or observable or verifiable) means that a method or procedure must exist to assess and record the quality of the outcomes. Some work is measured easily; in other cases, behaviors or results need to be verified or observed.
- **A - Aligned** means drawing a line of sight between job objectives throughout the organization so that all are working toward the same goal. This improves the performance of the team, the command, and the entire organization.
- **R - Realistic/Relevant:** Realistic means the achievement of a job objective is something an employee or a team can do to support a work-unit goal. The job objective is achievable with the resources and personnel available and within the time available. Relevant implies that the job objective is important to the employee and the organization.
- **T - Timed (or timely, time-bound)** means there is a point in time when the job objective will start or when it will be completed.

**Information from the NSPS website at <http://www.cpm.sosd.mil/nsps/index.html>.**

*LaBure, from page 11*

As for multi-service contracting, rather than issuing separate contracts for various real estate components, such as appraisals, legal descriptions and plats, and title work, LaBure and her team rolled the needed resources into a single contract, giving Real Estate the flexibility required in an environment where it was impossible to pinpoint exactly what was needed.

"The vision I had for Real Estate changed on August 29th [2005]," LaBure said. "Before, I could look six months to a year ahead and have a pretty good understanding of how I would deploy resources. Now it's at most a month ahead."

LaBure estimates that the workload for the Real Estate Division tripled, if not quadrupled after Katrina. And she sees that level of activity continuing for the next several years. Asked if she misses the pre-Katrina days, she says "sometimes, but we cannot look back, we have to keep moving forward."

According to LaBure, the post-Katrina demands have

re-energized her organization and given it a new sense of purpose.

"We recognize we are playing a part in an historic mission in our region," she said. "All the work is important including our regular mission, the work on the hurricane protection system, and future work such as LACPR (Louisiana Coastal Protection & Restoration)."

"We have a motto in Real Estate: Together we succeed. Katrina presented us with a new challenge, caused us to be innovative, and brought us together as a team. Those are the positives," said LaBure. "We provide a service that's key to getting the job done here in New Orleans. I'm very proud to be the Chief of this organization. My staff members are the real heroes."

On August 6, 2007, LaBure received the Real Estate Community of Practice Professional of the Year Award at the Corps Summer Leaders Conference National Awards Dinner and Ceremony in Providence, Rhode Island.





# Corps hurricane exercise a PR success

*Public Affairs Office honored by peers for excellence*

by Cheryn Robles

The New Orleans District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Public Affairs Office was honored with an award of merit from the New Orleans Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America at the annual Hornblower Awards ceremony in mid-November.

The Public Relations Society of America is the country's pre-eminent public relations professional organization.

The Army Corps' earned recognition for its effective "Hurricane Preparedness Exercise", which simulated preparations for an emergency response in the event of a storm. The Corps would work in tandem with local elected officials and emergency operations personnel. The simulation included members of the hurricane response teams in New Orleans and Mississippi Valley Division Headquarters and coincided with the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. It was used as a catalyst for the Corps to demonstrate improvements made to the regional hurricane protection system over the last two years.

Local, national and international media were invited to the



**17th St. Canal pumps being tested during the Corps' "Hurricane Preparedness Exercise" in August.**

*(USACE Photo)*

simulation event. In addition to each of the local television news stations broadcasting live from the 17th Street and the Harvey Canals, CNBC, Fox News, the British Broadcasting Company, French Television, Getty Images and the Christian Science Monitor covered the event with many positive stories.

*Dutch, from page 7*

Van Ledden is one of several Dutch engineer members working with the district's Hydraulics Branch, along with assisting the Hurricane Protection Office (HPO) and providing input on the LACPR Final Technical Report.

"Some of the data is certainly useful," said Naomi. "The process in employing some of this data is certainly comparable, but it's not all transferrable."

Despite some issues that may have to be adapted to complement Louisiana, the Corps is utilizing some of the approaches used with the Dutch system. "One of the major things the Dutch did first after the 1953 storm was to close a lot of the tidal basins in order to shorten our lines of defense and thus be less vulnerable," said Van Ledden. "Now you see the Corps utilizing a similar type of approach by closing off the outfall canals with gates to block storm surge in Lake Pontchartrain from entering the canals."

The 1953 storm was considered a 350-year storm event and comparable with Katrina. The Deltaworks system has not been tested to the extent of a 10,000-year storm yet, but significant weather events in recent years have put the system in action. In order to maintain the system, a 1996 flood protection act required a safety assessment of the Dutch system by the local water boards every five years to evaluate the flood defense system's level of protection. The assessment looks at weather changes such as sea level rise, along with drainage concerns or population changes that may indicate a need to elevate the system.

"When the flood protection doesn't meet the criteria

any more, the Water Boards have to develop plans for adaptation and improvement in cooperation with the other governmental agencies," said Van Ledden, who considers such a process as one that could benefit the flood protection system in Louisiana.

In order to even consider implementing such a vast system, Naomi said there needs to be a national commitment. Unlike the U.S., most of the country of the Netherlands is prone to flooding. "There is a national commitment to that high level of protection in the Netherlands," said Naomi. "We, as of yet, don't have that commitment. It's a national priority for the Netherlands because their lives and their country's survivability depend on it. We don't have that same problem in the U.S. because most of the country doesn't face this type of destruction which is limited to our coastal area (i.e., New Orleans and coastal Louisiana). To those that live here, it's an urgent problem that we are trying to address."

The Corps and the Dutch agree they are both committed to sharing knowledge and finding solutions that will ultimately provide the highest level of protection for coastal Louisiana. The Corps is currently working to reach a system of 100-year level of protection within the next few years, but like the Netherlands, it will take longer to reach a complete system.

"It is a gradual process," said Van Ledden. "We [The Dutch] can share our knowledge, but on the other end we also learn from the Corps. Flood protection is not just a task for a year; it's an on-going, continuous process with changes, and finding the best ways to protect ourselves. The 100-year level of protection will not be the final stop for Southeast Louisiana. It is just the first step to a better level of protection."

# Environmental process takes to the streets

*Corps pulls resources together to speed up the process for hurricane protection*

by Dave Mack

Do the math:

- It takes the Corps, on average, between two and ten years to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Target completion date for 100-year protection in Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity and West Bank and Vicinity is 2011.
- It will take between two and four years to design and build the Hurricane Protection System to the 100-year level and you cannot start work until the Environmental Impact Statement is completed.
- Beginning in the spring of 2007, how much time do you have to file an EIS on the 100-year protection project?

If your answer is “between zero and minus eight years,” have a cigar. If you’re responsible for producing that EIS, have some aspirin.

Whenever the Corps or any federal agency takes an action that could significantly impact natural and human environments, it’s required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to file an environmental impact statement. It almost goes without saying that the build out of the Hurricane Protection System to the 100-year level will have environmental impacts. Equally obvious is the fact that the EIS process, as traditionally employed, potentially posed serious problems for providing timely protection to the New Orleans metro area.

“If it took five years to complete the Lake Pontchartrain EIS – without any hold-ups, without anyone taking it to court – instead of finishing construction on the Hurricane Protection System by June of 2011, it would be 2012 before we completed the EIS,” explains Gib Owen, Chief, of the Corps’ Ecological

Planning and Restoration Section and the Environmental Coordinator for the Hurricane Protection System. “That wasn’t going to work—not for the citizens of this community and not for The Army Corps of Engineers.”

That reality drove Owen to develop an innovative approach to complying with NEPA on an expedited basis. With Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as evidence of the “imminent risk” confronting the region, he took advantage of NEPA language that provides for “alternative arrangements” in emergency situations.

Since NEPA was enacted in 1970, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) had approved alternative arrangements 38 times to facilitate environmental assessment in emergency situations. In each of those instances, the environmental impacts were assessed “after the fact” – after the emergency work had been started or was completed.

The 39th approval (100-year protection) is the first “before the fact” approach to be sanctioned. Rather than a single EIS for the entire 100-year protection project, there are 17 Individual Environmental Reports (IERs). Essentially, Owen’s innovation was to divide the whole into parts. Before a shovel of dirt is turned on any of those parts, an IER analyzing the actions proposed by the Corps will be completed and the public will have been given multiple chances to voice their views of the proposed action.

“There’s never been anything like this,” says Owen. “Our (IER) process addresses the intent of NEPA, preserves the rule of law, and provides the government a mechanism to meet the needs of the emergency in New Orleans.

“We’ve developed a process that can be set in place relatively easily to speed the process along and it can be used somewhere else if another disaster hits.”

That process is highly disciplined. It involves timely reports, public meetings, monthly meetings with agency partners, a dedicated website ([nolaenvironmental.gov](http://nolaenvironmental.gov)), and an almost constant ongoing public dialogue.

Owen says the Corps has historically assessed proposed Federal actions by holding a “scoping” meeting for a particular project where potential alternatives and impacts with stakeholders are reviewed.

The Corps would then review the material from the meetings and the process would take a few years to decide. Gib admits the normal pre-Katrina process would catch many residents off-



**Julie Vignes (left) explains a Corps project to one of the local citizens during the open house portion of the IER public meetings. Vignes is one of many project managers meeting face-to-face with locals to give them a better understanding of current and upcoming Corps hurricane protection projects. (Photo by Geralyn Ryan)**



**Owens (left) and John Ashley, senior project manager for the permanent pump stations of the Hurricane Protection Office (HPO), discuss information prior to an IER presentation. The IER public meetings give project managers an opportunity to present information to the public on projects in their area. (Photo by Geralyn Ryan)**

guard when decisions were made with only a 30-day comment period.

“Now (with IERs), we’re really engaging the public. It’s a very open process. And the public is so informed, that when they see the recommended alternative in an IER, they’re going to say: ‘Oh, yeah, this is what we’ve been talking about.’”

The projects are discussed at public meetings where project managers review the design alternatives under consideration, answer questions and solicit input. There have been over 30 public meetings since the IER process was launched in March. Attendance at the meetings has ranged from one to 150, with the average attendance between 30 and 40. Additionally, monthly meetings have been held with state and federal resource agencies to gain their input.

Input is also received via posts at the [nolaenvironmental.gov](http://nolaenvironmental.gov) website, regular mail or phone calls. Each IER has a deadline – six to ten months for most projects, somewhat longer for more complex projects that have more alternatives and more impacts. A tentative plan is developed and sent out for 30 days for public comment. Then, New Orleans District Commander Alvin Lee will make the final design decision from the proposed alternatives.

The first draft IER was sent out for public review on October 29, and a second one followed in November. Many more will follow in the next couple of months. “We will have knocked four-and-one-half years off the environmental review process for some sub-units of the Hurricane Protection System,” says Owen.

Once an IER has been approved, construction contracts can be awarded for the area the compliance document covers.

Beyond construction of levee and floodwall projects, the IER concept is also being used for analyzing borrow and mitigation alternatives, with the first two borrow IERs completed and sent out for public review.

Each IER will contain all the features of an EIS: a description of the proposed action and alternatives to that action; a discussion of the significant resources found in the project vicinity; an analysis of direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the action and its alternatives on the human and natural environmental; and a rationale for the selection of the action or

one of the alternatives.

After all of the IERs have been completed, a comprehensive environmental document will tie all of analysis, decisions and unavoidable impacts together, providing a total system view of the 100-year protection project.

The term “environmental impact” conjures up, as Owen puts it, the notion of “bugs and bunnies.” It is that, in part, but it’s much more.

“We’re not looking for just the best environmental solution, but the best human solution, the best engineering solution. We’re looking at what’s buildable and looking for the best cost solution. The final solution is the one that provides us with the biggest bang environmentally, from an engineering perspective, and economically for the dollar being spent.”

The IER public meetings will eventually present project alternatives that weren’t already under consideration. Owen says that proposals have been altered based on input from the public.

As history has shown, environmental assessment is subject to legal challenge and that begs the question: Isn’t the risk of environmental litigation 17 times greater under the IER process than it would be if the Corps filed a single EIS?

Owen doesn’t think so. For one thing, the public engagement is sufficiently extensive that issues involved in the design ultimately selected will likely have been fully aired before moving forward. And should there be challenges, they will be to specific IERs, meaning that rather than place the entire Hurricane Protection System at risk of delay, work can go forward on projects that have cleared environmental hurdles.

While the public has had plenty to say – both positive and negative – about proposed design alternatives, there’s been little opposition to the IER process, no major roadblocks.

“With a project of this size, we know it’s not possible to make everyone happy,” says Owen. “But under these alternative arrangements, I believe we have a more transparent, more collaborative process, and I think that is going to drive us to make better decisions for the Hurricane Protection System as a whole.”

For more information, go to [www.nolaenvironmental.gov](http://www.nolaenvironmental.gov).



# Claims collection put teamwork in action

*Katrina claims countdown showcases MVN's commitment to the community*

by James Walter, Emergency Operations

August 27-29, 2007 were typical New Orleans weather days, hot with occasional heavy rain, but the New Orleans District employees responded to the general public of the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area (GNO-MA) by providing pick-up stations for the collection of Katrina claims. This was the week of the final countdown for filing claims against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, resulting from the impact to the area by Hurricane Katrina.

The Corps provided three daytime pick-up stations located outside the immediate facilities of the New Orleans District. Each station was supplied with a canopy, port-a-potty, iced water, and snacks. These stations were operated between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. each day. A fourth station was set up on the district's property for the August 29 late night collection from 6:00 p.m. to midnight.

The purpose for setting up these pick-up stations was to make it convenient for citizens to drop off their claim forms and to provide them by person-to-person contact.

The district's Public Affair Office (PAO) sent the location maps and information for media appearances on to the local newspaper, television and radio stations to explain the plan for claims collection procedures. In addition, an MVN Internet website was set up for the public's use.

In the District's Office of Counsel (OC), a telephone bank was set up to assist with any questions citizens had about the pick-up stations and assistance with filing their forms. There were over 12 employees working the telephone bank from 8:00 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. each day for weeks before August 27 and continued through August 29.

Preparations were on-going for at least three weeks before this three-day event. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and OC spearheaded all the plans and preparations, from

recruiting volunteers to work to providing an escort for the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) Commander.

Notices were sent throughout the New Orleans District asking MVN employees to volunteer for this effort which resulted in over 125 Corps of Engineers and contract employees answering the call. Each morning, beginning August 27, the volunteers reported to the EOC for instructions and supplies provided by employees Jeff Carroll and Mary Kinsey. Team leaders and team members were assigned to the pick-up locations, given supplies, instructions and then driven to the locations by an assigned driver.

On Wednesday, August 29, MVD Commander, Brigadier General Robert Crear, toured all the pick-up stations. He came to extend his appreciation to the volunteers for their dedicated work. Eventually, BG Crear also joined in to help collect claim forms and greet the citizens passing by reaching out his hand to receive the claim form and say, "Thank you for letting us serve you".

There were over 125 employees from all district departments that volunteered to help. The Orleans Levee District (OLD) the New Orleans Fire Department (NOFD), and numerous district offices including, MVN Security and Logistics (LMO) volunteered their services.

An array of preparations had to be established. Preparations for location maps, health, supplies, safety, security, work schedules, rest breaks, traffic patterns, communications, and severe weather conditions were all considered.

Once the claim forms were collected they were transported to the district headquarters. Additionally, OC had a room reserved for mailed claims to assure compliance with mail receipt, sorting and delivery protocol. The work and the preparation were difficult, the days were long, but the rewards were great. The efforts succeeded in collecting over 150,000 claim forms.



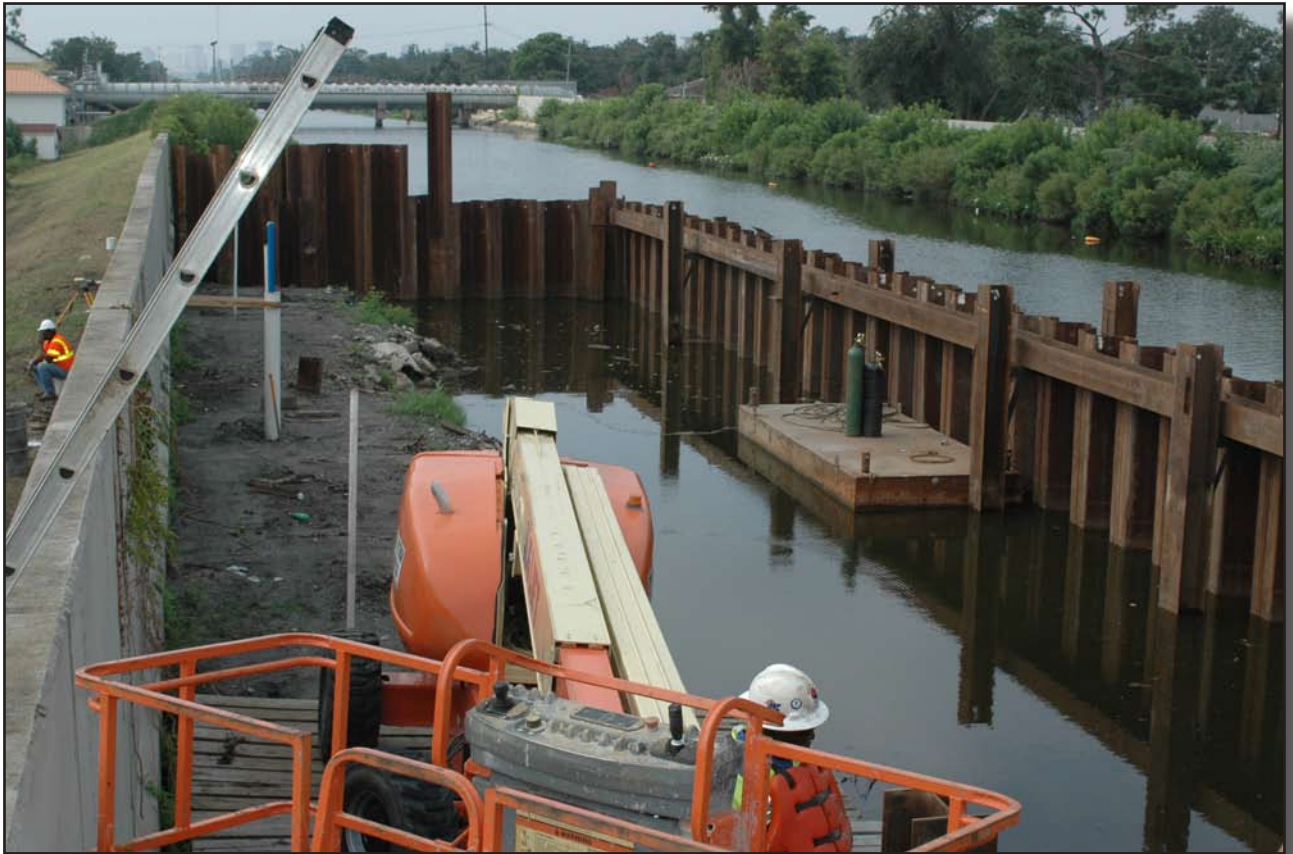
**(Left Photo)** MVD Commander, Brigadier General Robert Crear collects Katrina claim forms on Aug. 29. **(Right Photo)** Jim Walters and Crear stand in one of the three pick-up stations. *(Photo by USACE)*

MVN AT WORK



**The London Ave. load test involved constructing a cofferdam along a 150-foot section of I-wall on the inside of the canal.**

*(Photo by Scott Riecke)*



## **London Ave. Canal safe water levels raised**

The safe water elevation at London Ave. Canal was raised from four to five feet after extensive engineering analysis and an elaborate load test. By raising the elevation by one foot, it will allow the city to pump water into the canal at a higher rate and allow the floodgates to remain open during a storm event. A cofferdam isolated a particular section of the I-wall considered to be the weakest point. Water levels were raised incrementally within the cofferdam. The analysis took approximately three weeks to complete. On Aug. 22, 2007, the test reached the 7-foot mark. The project was a collaborative effort between the Corps, its partners and stakeholders.

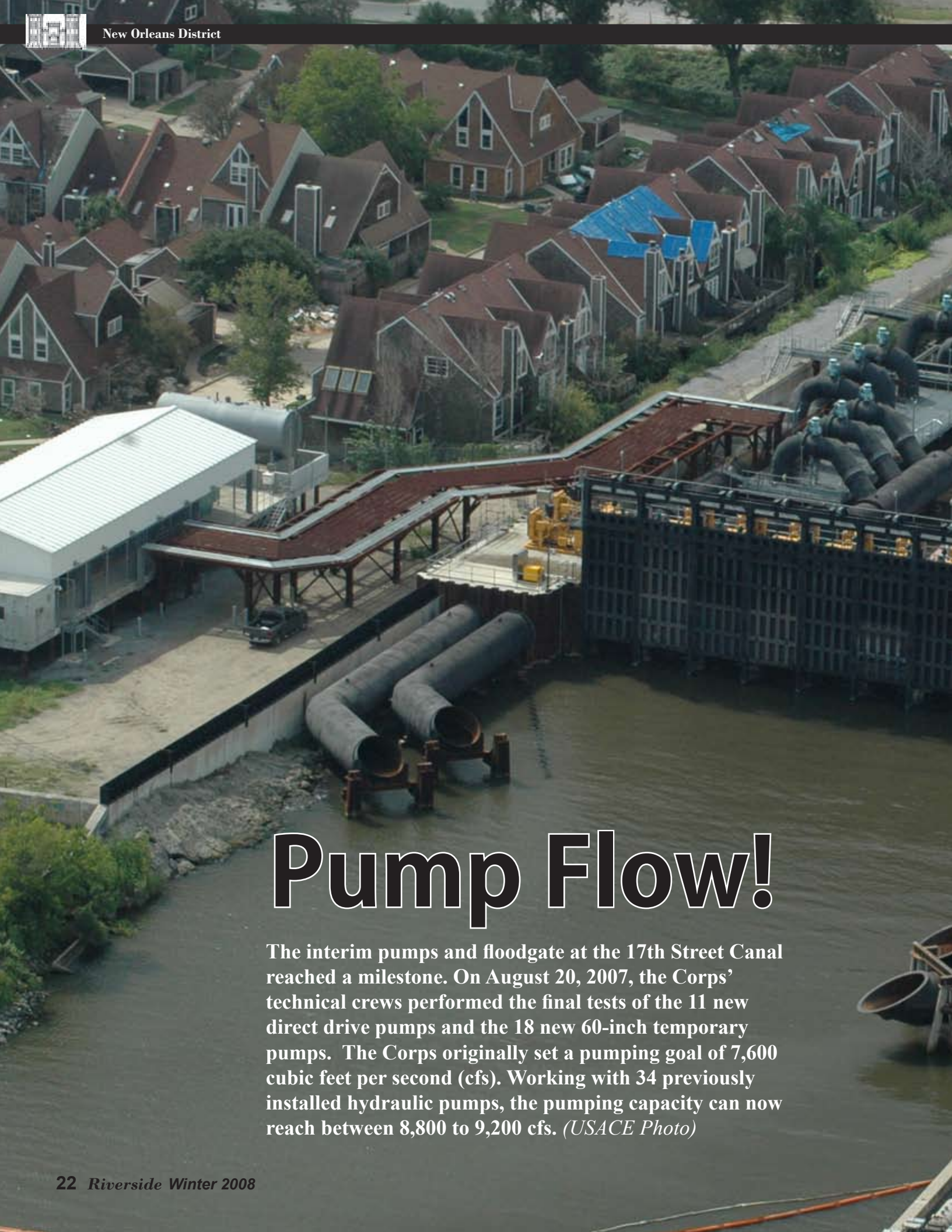
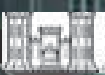
## **District wins SBA Crystal Award**

For the second consecutive year, the New Orleans District received the Crystal Award as Buyer of the Year from the Small Business Administration. The district led all federal agencies in Louisiana in the number of dollars awarded to small businesses, particularly 8(a) contractors. This marks the district's third time to receive the award. During fiscal year 2007, the district awarded \$422 million to small businesses, or 47 percent of all contract dollars awarded; approximately \$123 million was awarded to small disadvantaged businesses. According to Lt. Col. Murray Starkel, Deputy Commander, "this recognition is the result of a strong team, unified in purpose and working together to reduce the risk of flooding here in New Orleans."

**Small Business Procurement Analyst, Ned Foley (left) and Lt. Col. Murray Starkel accept the award for the district.**

*(Photo by Scott Riecke)*





# Pump Flow!

The interim pumps and floodgate at the 17th Street Canal reached a milestone. On August 20, 2007, the Corps' technical crews performed the final tests of the 11 new direct drive pumps and the 18 new 60-inch temporary pumps. The Corps originally set a pumping goal of 7,600 cubic feet per second (cfs). Working with 34 previously installed hydraulic pumps, the pumping capacity can now reach between 8,800 to 9,200 cfs. *(USACE Photo)*



For more information on the Hurricane Protection System, go to [www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps](http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/hps)

## CONGRATULATIONS

(Right) *Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk*. Corps employees ran for the cure for this year's 5K Walk on Sept. 29, 2007. The team raised \$2,145! Photo left to right: Louise Debose, Gwen Johnson, Greg Debose, Keiara Phillips, Wayne & Peggy Plaisance, June Murphree, George and Tina Seghers, Johan Barrios (holding Lola the dog) and Lynn Dufrechou, ACS rep. Participants not shown: Mike Murphree (taking picture) Veneta Mays, Amena Henville, Phyllis Clay. (Photo by Mike Murphree)



## BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

(Left) District commander Col. Lee led the annual Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Kickoff with a roaring, New Orleans-fashion second line with some help from two Hornets basketball cheerleaders, the Honeybees. This year's theme was "Giving Back - It's Naturally N'awlins" featuring Corps employees who performed as local TV news celebrities. The campaign kicked off on Oct. 22 and ended Nov. 9, 2007. The district surpassed its goal of \$80,000 by receiving over \$120,000 in donations this year. (Photo by Nancy Mayberry)



## CFC CAMPAIGN KICKOFF

- James R. Wolff** (CD), became licensed as a Professional Engineer (PE) in the State of Louisiana on July 18.
- **MAJ Robert Culberson** (ED-S) on the completion of Command and General Staff College Aug 3.
- **Daniel Keiffer** (OD) and wife Liz on the birth of their daughter, Emma, on Aug 3.
- Johlee Schinetsky, daughter of **Steven A. Schinetsky** (OD), was crowned "Miss Dance of Louisiana, 2008" at the Louisiana

## FAREWELL

Steven Auttonberry (OD), Aug 07  
 Donna Bivona (ED), May 07  
 Melissia Buckhalter-Honore (OC), June 07  
 Jennie Ebanks (RM), July 07  
 John F. Ebanks (OD), June 07  
 Matthew L. Edwards (OD), June 07  
 Leonard M. Evans (OD), May 07  
 Gerald Farias (OD), July 07  
 Anthony Gallodoro (ED), July 07  
 Richard Gatewood (PM), Oct 07  
 Howard D. Goldman (OD), Sept 07  
 Rodney Greenup (PM), Sept 07  
 Gretchen Hammond (ED), Aug 07  
 Robert Harrington (OD), July 07

Victor A. Harris (PAO), Aug 07  
 D'Mark L. Hunter (ED), Aug 07  
 Kate E. Herpin (OD), Aug 07  
 C. Geanette Kelley (RE), Sept 07  
 Royce B. Kemp (OD), Aug 07  
 Shawn Kempshall (OD), June 07  
 Kathleen Klein (OC), April 07  
 Dawn M. Lambert (RE), April 07  
 Carolyn Leon (RM), Sept 07  
 Jessica Livingstone (OD), Aug 07  
 George Loupe Sr. (OD), Sept 07  
 Everett O. Mappin (CD), May 07  
 Edward L Mayer (IM), April 07  
 Dwayne D. McLallen (CD), Oct 07  
 Kody Meaux (OD), Aug 07

Donald Miller (LM), June 07  
 Evans Mitchell (OD), Aug 07  
 Michael Mulder (OD), July 07  
 Bryan R. Nuss (OD), May 07  
 Ladreine E. Price (CT), June 07  
 Daniel J. Sammon (OD), May 07  
 Samuel Sea (OD), June 07  
 Howard J. Thibodaux (OD), May 07  
 Daniel K. Tyson (OD), April 07  
 Richard J. Voss (OD), April 07  
 Rosalie Y. Washington (LM), Sept 07  
 Danny L Wiegand (ED), Aug 07  
 Stephen A. Wilcox (OD), Sept 07  
 James R. Wolff (CD), Oct 07

To submit a notice to Around the District, please e-mail the editor at [eric.a.hughes@usace.army.mil](mailto:eric.a.hughes@usace.army.mil).





Association of Dance Masters annual competition held Nov. 1-3 at McAllister Auditorium in New Orleans. Johlee will next compete at the Dance Masters of America National Convention next summer in Orlando, FL.

-Margaret Popovich, daughter of **George Popovich** (CD), graduated Dec. 21 from LSU Baton Rouge as Summa Cum Laude in Biology. She plans to pursue a career in the medical field.

## CONDOLENCES

*To family and friends of...*

**Michael Boutte** (OD), who passed away on Aug 9.

**Richard Broussard** (ED), whose mother, Dolores (Dee), passed away on Oct. 2.

**Salvatore Louis "Sal" Castelluccio Jr.** (OD), retired Corps employee, who passed away July 16.

**Debra A. Jackson** (CEIWR-NDC-CC), who passed away on Aug 16.

**Patricia LeBlanc** (CT), whose husband, Cleveland, passed away July 20.

**Walter F. Teckemeyer** (ED), whose mother, Helen, passed away Aug. 4.

**Ray Thorne** (ED), whose father, Raymond, passed away Apr. 12.

**Jo-Ann W. Woods** (EEO), whose mother, Dessie Williams, unexpectedly passed away Oct. 11.

**Veronica Williams** (PM), whose son, Kevin, passed away Oct. 4.



(Above) The district's Hispanic Employment Program Committee created a fiesta finale in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month in October. A celebration was held on Oct. 30, 2007, in the District Assembly Room featuring keynote speakers Martin Gutierrez, the Director of the Hispanic Apostolate for New Orleans and local CBS-affiliate, WWL-Ch. 4 anchor, Lucy Bustamante. This year's theme was "Making a Positive Impact on American Society." Photo left to right: Gutierrez, Bustamante with committee president, Joaquin Mujica (OD). (Photo by Scott Riecke)

## RETIREMENTS

**Gerald J. Barbe** (OD), Sept 07

**Sandra Brehm** (ED), May 07

**Michael N. Buford** (PM), Sept 07

**Ada W. Chaney** (RE), Sept 07

**Louis Danflous** (ED), May 07

**Kay C. Dorsey** (CD), June 07

**Donald J. Gaspard** (OD), Aug 07

**John W. Hall** (PAO), Sept 07

**Thomas Hassenboehler** (ED), May 07

**Richard Kelleher** (OD), Aug 07

**Don W. King** (OD), Jul 07

**Bernadette B. Lebleu** (OD), Sept 07

**Allen J. Matherne, Sr.** (OD), June 07

**Wayne Naquin** (ED), Oct 07

**Abner J. Phillips, Jr.** (LM), April 07

**Eddie Picard** (OD), June 2007

**Donald M Serex** (IM), Sept 07

**Alan Shultz** (OC), May 07

**Michael E. Stout** (OD/PRO?), Sept 07

**Wilson J. Touchet** (OD), June 07

**Warren Welman III** (OD)

**Dave Wurtzel** (ED), Aug 07



John Hall (right) and his wife Beverly celebrate John's retirement from the Corps last September. Mr. Hall held the respect of his fellow Corps employees, partners and stakeholders for his vast knowledge in numerous subjects, particularly navigation and the mighty Mississippi River. A former Times-Picayune reporter, John made the Public Affairs Office his home for the last 12 years. (Photo by Mike Maples)



# MRGO Final Report & Legislative Environmental Imp

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made the Integrated Final Report to Congress and Legislative Environmental Impact Statement for the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Deep-Draft De-authorization (MRGO-3D) Study available on its web site at <http://mrgo.usace.army.mil/>.

After delivery of the report to Congress, implementing the closure plan will require the following:

- completing design work in spring 2008
- signing a cooperation agreement with State of Louisiana
- acquiring real estate needed to build and maintain the closure structure

MRGO




# Impact Statement available to the public

- coordinating closure with navigation and fishing interests
- advertising a construction contract
- awarding a contract to build the MRGO closure structure in summer 2008

# MRGO De-Authorization

Photo: Bayou La Loutre in St. Bernard Parish will be the site of the proposed rock structure to close the MRGO. The structure will close the channel to navigation. The specifications require more than 900,000 tons of rock and will extend 150 feet on the outlet's south bank and 250 feet on the north bank. Completed in 1968, the MRGO cost \$92 million to build and stretches 76 miles long. Its purpose was to provide a shorter route to the Port of New Orleans. *(USACE Photo)*



**“The Corps of Engineers has  
committed to provide 100-year level  
of protection by June 2011  
...or break our backs trying.”**

**-- Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp, Chief of Engineers**

**New Orleans District Headquarters**  
*(USACE Photo)*

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