

## NEX Dividends Help Fund New EPICENTER and Other Upgrades

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*By Patty Babb, special to Navy Installations Command Public Affairs*

Work currently is underway on the Navy's largest non-appropriated funds construction (NAFCON) project, the Naval Station (NAVSTA) Great Lakes Epicenter, which is expected to open its doors in July 2016.

The \$14 million state-of-the-art entertainment complex is an expansion of the installation's current enlisted club. The new all-hands facility will include 28 bowling lanes, a 175-seat movie theater, a live entertainment area and a revamped food service concept. On Nov. 10, ground was broken on the bowling phase of the project.

"I think the epicenter will be the premiere, all-around entertainment facility in the Navy and maybe all of DoD (Department of Defense), once completed," said John Prue, NAVSTA Great Lakes Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) director. "It will set the stage for a variety of quality MWR programs and services all under one roof.

"Here at Great Lakes, the epicenter will not only support some of the Navy's newest Sailors, but the entire Great Lakes community, offering something for everyone," he added.

The epicenter is an example of the kinds of NAFCON projects that benefit from the Navy Exchange Service Command's (NEXCOM) annual contribution to Navy quality of life programs. NEXCOM shares 70 percent of its profits with the Navy's MWR program every year. Last year, NEXCOM contributed \$46.6 million to MWR.

"MWR programs have a tremendously positive impact on our Navy community by providing various opportunities to learn, grow and play," said Jerry Hieb, director of the Navy's Fleet and Family Readiness Support Services Division. "The annual NEX dividend is essential to our continued efforts to enhance the lives of our Sailors and their families."

The NEX dividend is used in a variety of ways, but NAFCON projects are a key benefactor of the annual sum. For example, at Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West, \$2.1 million in upgrades were finalized in August at the Sigsbee Sports Complex. The renovation replaced natural turf softball and multi-purpose fields with new synthetic turf fields, and also included new fencing and scoreboards. At the nearby Sigsbee Park, plans for a new splash pad will soon offer families a welcome respite from the heat.

Similar upgrades are underway on existing recreation facilities at installations worldwide, such as bowling alleys, golf courses and dining facilities.

"In addition to the EPICENTER, Naval Station Great Lakes MWR has put back nearly \$9 million NAF dollars into renovations and upgrades of facilities and equipment since 2008," said Prue. "Those funds were from local MWR and Navy Exchange profits, and they show how our patrons' business directly supports quality of life programs."