



Corps resumes vegetation management operations



(Left to right) San Fernando Valley Audubon Society President Dave Weeshof, Los Angeles District Commander Col. Mark Toy and SFVAS Conservation Chair Kris Ohlenkamp lead a group of Corps employees and local environmentalists on a nature walk Feb. 12 at the Sepulveda Dam Basin vegetation management area. (USACE photo by Jay Field)

By Jay Field

ENCINO, Calif. — During a nearly three-hour nature walk in the Sepulveda Dam Basin Feb. 12, Los Angeles District Commander Col. Mark Toy told representatives of local environmental groups that his operations and maintenance crews would resume the vegetation management work that began in December 2012. Work would continue Feb. 19 and include chipping felled trees and limbs and spreading the mulch in the upland area. This work is part of the first phase of a three-phase, five-year project to convert the area to a more valuable and sustainable habitat that will improve flood risk management operations and enhance public safety.

Depending on the time remaining before the start of the nesting season, estimated to begin by mid-March, a Corps biologist and a native plant expert from the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Areas Steering Committee would also identify and mark non-native trees for removal.

“I think it would be appropriate if we’re just going to limit our scope to evergreen ash, ficus and eucalyptus; those would be pretty easy to identify,” said Steve Hartman of the California Native Plant Society. “I would love to have all those removed.”

Los Angeles District Regulatory Division Chief Dave

— see VEGETATION, Page 2 —

— VEGETATION from Page 1 —

Castanon said the Corps has been communicating the restart of operations with the Regional Water Quality Control Board, which had placed an Investigative Order on the project to determine impacts to water quality.

“They didn’t express any objections; they seemed, actually, to agree that chipping and leaving the chips here, as opposed to taking them off site, was preferable and acceptable to them,” said Castanon.

“Our vision of this area is evolving a little bit, too, from what we’re hearing from you, as well,” said Kris Ohlenkamp, San Fernando Valley Audubon Society conservation chair. “Agreed, don’t put anymore cottonwood trees in here--you don’t need them--but oak trees, yeah. They’re big trees, but they’re very stable trees.”

The nature walk was the continuation of collaborative meetings with the Corps and Ohlenkamp, as well as with other members of the local interest groups like the Sierra Club and the Encino Neighborhood Council. It was a chance for Toy to introduce new members of the Corps team now involved with the project.

“I wanted them to hear your perspective,” said Toy. “At the end of the day, I want you to be comfortable with what we’re doing moving forward.”

The walk included a visit to the city-maintained Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Area, where participants could visualize the possibilities for revegetation of the area south of Burbank Boulevard. There was some disagreement as to exactly what kind of habitat could be created there, but it subsided with the promise of continued collaboration on a way forward.

“Let’s work out those details, because this does get to be fairly complicated with the different species and how long they live and what fauna they support,” said Dave Weeshof, SFVAS president. “We could propose a species, but you

say, ‘Wait a minute, now, from our point of view that’s not so good.’ Well, let’s find that compromise.”

“We’re going to work together to figure out the best use,” said Toy. “I want it to be valuable habitat for all of us, but I don’t want it to be vegetation that’s going to create a huge expense for us to maintain it.”

According to Corps operations staff, crews will use a backhoe and an excavator to pull felled trees and limbs out of the “pothole pond” for chipping. The excavator will allow the crew extended reach to minimize further impacts to disturbed areas.



Kris Ohlenkamp, San Fernando Valley Audubon Society conservation chair, suggests possible revegetation options in the Sepulveda Basin vegetation management area to Col. Mark Toy, Los Angeles District commander, during a nature walk in the Sepulveda basin vegetative management area Feb. 12. At left, the group was pleased to see egrets along Haskell Creek at the time of the visit. (USACE photos by Jay Field)

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Dear District Teammates,

Our Nation is facing considerable fiscal challenges. As the Army Chief of Staff said, "Fiscal uncertainty is arguably the greatest threat to our national security." Budget complexities of a yearlong Continuing Resolution, sequestration and other impacts to the military combine to create potential serious shortfalls to the Army and, closer to home, the Los Angeles District.

All this uncertainty, I know, generates great concern for you. I remain committed to sharing with you the limited information we have received.

The Secretary of Defense notified Congress of the potential need to place civilian employees on administrative furloughs, which could begin in late April and include up to 22 days of furlough, through the end of fiscal year 2013. On Feb. 21, we initiated formal contact with Local 777 to advise them that the SECDEF had notified Congress of the possibility of a furlough should sequestration come to pass. We anticipate meeting with the union to initiate discussions on appropriate arrangements should a furlough become necessary. As discussions continue, we will provide you updates.

In the meantime, we have begun implementing fiscal restrictions across multiple domains, such as undergoing a hiring freeze, approving only mission critical training and travel, and minimizing overtime and compensatory time. These restrictions are designed to enable us to execute essential functions for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Deputy Chief of Engineers and Deputy Commanding General of USACE Maj. Gen. Semonite said in a recent "SemoNOTE" that we must change our overtime culture,

in concert with the Army policy of "Do Less With Less." The DCG stated, "Overtime should be a wise business decision, not an entitlement or a routine process."

I know most of you work those extra hours out of sheer dedication and commitment to the projects and stakeholders who are counting on you to complete the important work their communities are in desperate need of. No one wants to lose momentum on a project, but we also have a responsibility to taxpayers to use our resources effectively and to safeguard funds from fraud, waste and abuse. Therefore, all requests for overtime and compensatory time must be justified, documented and approved in accordance with USACE policy.

I understand these fiscal challenges and resulting uncertainties are a source of additional stress on all of us, both personally and professionally. I wish I could provide even more clarity on what will happen after March 1st but, at this time, we simply do not know. I assure you that as we receive

subsequent updates from our higher headquarters, we will continue to be open and transparent in providing you the most up-to-date information.

I thank you for your professionalism and patience, as we all await clarity on the fiscal picture. In the meantime, we will continue our mission of BUILDING STRONG AND TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE!

Warm Regards,

COL Toy



District Commander: Col. R. Mark Toy

Public Affairs Officer: Jay Field

Editor: Kristen Skopec

Staff: Daniel J. Calderón, Greg Fuderer,
Brooks O. Hubbard IV, Beverly Patterson,
Dave Salazar and Mario Zepeda

Tel: (213) 452-3922 or Fax: (213) 452-4209.

The NewsCastle is published monthly under the provisions of AR 360-1 for the employees and extended Engineer Family of the Los Angeles District, USACE.

Views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the District or of the Department of Defense.

Address mail to the Los Angeles District Public Affairs Office, ATTN: NewsCastle Editor
P.O. Box 532711, Los Angeles, CA 90017-2325

E-mail the Public Affairs staff at: publicaffairs.SPL@usace.army.mil

Public provides extensive comments on Gregory Canyon landfill permit application

By Greg Fuderer

ESCONDIDO, Calif. — Nearly 400 people attended a public hearing Jan. 31 at the California Center for the Arts here on a permit application for the proposed Gregory Canyon landfill near Pala, providing scientific data, historical information and personal perspective, both for and against the controversial project.

During the nearly three-and-a-half hour hearing, about 80 speakers representing elected officials, government agencies, business groups, environmental organizations and themselves gave comments to Col. Mark Toy, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, the agency in charge of issuing, modifying or denying the permit.

“As many of you know, we recently extended the public comment period to submit written comments until April 15th, giving agencies and the public an additional 60 days to comment,” Toy said in his introductory remarks. “The Corps will carefully and fully consider all comments that we receive for the proposed project as part of our final permit decision.”

The Corps held the hearing as part of the process to determine whether the proposed project is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative for a San Diego County landfill that will receive up to one million tons of waste material annually and up to 30 million tons in total.

The review process will study impacts on water quality, endangered species, cultural resources, economics and flood hazards, among other issues.

“The Corps determined that this proposed project could result in significant impacts due to the nature and scope of the proposed activities involving impacts to Corps jurisdiction and therefore requires an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS,” Toy said.

Bill Miller, the Corps regulatory project manager for the Gregory Canyon permit application, described the ongoing process to attendees and moderated the public comment period.

“It was a good meeting with the public actively engaged,” Miller said. “They were passionate about their concerns and were willing participants in the process whether for or against. They really engaged in a healthy way.”

The Corps will continue to accept public comment on the matter until April 15. Comments can be sent to gregorycanyonEIS-SPL@usace.army.mil or to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, Regulatory Division, Carlsbad Field Office, Attention: Gregory Canyon, 5010 Hidden Valley Road, Suite 105, Carlsbad, CA 92011.



Bill Miller (left) and Col. Mark Toy listen to testimony about the proposed Gregory Canyon landfill provided during the public hearing held Jan. 31 at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, Calif. Nearly 80 speakers spoke in favor of and in opposition to the Corps approving the permit. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)



One of the speakers at the Gregory Canyon landfill public hearing held Jan. 31 at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido, Calif., expresses his opinion on the issues the Corps should consider while determining whether or not to issue an environmental permit that will allow work on the landfill to proceed. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)

Hope you "Like" us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/ladistrict



LA District hosts public meeting in Kingman

By Daniel J. Calderón

KINGMAN, Ariz. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District hosted a public meeting Feb. 5 regarding the upcoming Time Critical Removal Action at sites in the former Kingman Ground-to-Ground Gunnery Range.

The purpose of the meeting was to make representatives from the Corps of Engineers available to the public to discuss the soil removal activities of hazardous material associated with the clean up in a portion of the Chaparral Mesa II and New Kingman subdivisions located near the intersection of East Thompson Avenue and Rose Drive.

“We are here to take care of the people in these communities and build a stronger relationship between them and the Corps of Engineers,” said Fran Firouzi, the project manager for the LA District. “We want to make sure the people understand that we are here to do all we can to clean up the debris left over from the use of this land during World War II, and we will mitigate the risk to the health of the residents here.”

The sites involved in the removal action at the Formerly Used Defense Site were used as skeet ranges during World War II. The area was home to the Kingman Flexible Gunnery School, one of only seven schools of its kind in the U.S. There were 15 skeet ranges located at the gunnery school. The ranges were constructed side-by-side in an overlapping pattern. World War II clay pigeons were constructed with coal tar pitch which contains chemicals known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Skeet remnants, or the debris from clay targets, remain in the area.

Using the TCRA process, Firouzi



At the public meeting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District held Feb. 5 regarding the upcoming Time Critical Removal Action at sites in the former Kingman Ground-to-Ground Gunnery Range Fran Firouzi (left), project manager, and Susan Hill, realty specialist, speak with Jim Dennis (right) and another member of the local community. Firouzi, Hill and other members of the USACE team were among the representatives from the Corps' project team available to the public to discuss the soil removal activities of hazardous material associated with the TCRA. (USACE photo by Daniel J. Calderon)

said the Corps and its contractor, Eco and Associates, Inc., will “abate, prevent, minimize, stabilize, mitigate, or eliminate the release or threat of release” [40 Code of Federal Regulations 300.415(b) (1)]. A removal response is appropriate only when site-specific conditions indicate an imminent threat to human health, safety, or the environment (Engineer Regulation 200-3-1). Project activities will include the development of a TCRA work plan, public involvement activities, soil sampling, soil excavation and disposal, site restoration, and the development of the TCRA Completion Report. Eco will remove soil from the

affected properties in the time critical section and replace it with soil not contaminated with PAHs.

During the meeting, Corps representatives, along with members of the team involved with the project, spoke with members of the public and answered questions in the open forum. Nearly 30 members of the public attended the meeting.

“I think it went very well,” Firouzi said. “Our goal was to get the word out about our plan and to let the public get a better understanding of our policies. I think we were successful.”

The cleanup work began late February.



— WHEN YOU MAY HAVE ENCOUNTERED A MUNITION.

— DO NOT TOUCH, MOVE OR DISTURB IT,
BUT CAREFULLY LEAVE THE AREA.

— CALL 911!





During the Encinitas public meeting, several speakers provided comments to Corps employees (from left) Col. Mark Toy, Susie Ming, David Van Dorpe and Dr. Josephine Axt about the proposed coastal storm damage reduction project. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)

Corps solicits public comment on project

By Greg Fuderer

CARLSBAD, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held two public meetings in early February to discuss alternatives for and accept public comments about a shoreline protection project for the Southern California towns of Encinitas and Solana Beach.

“It’s a huge project that affects not only coastal storm damage, but the livelihood of the cities,” said Col. Mark Toy, commander of the Corps’ Los Angeles District, the agency in charge of managing the project if it is approved by the Corps and funded by Congress.

The Corps held meetings Feb. 6 in Encinitas and Feb. 7 in Solana Beach to present the recommended alternatives to protect the shorelines of the two coastal cities from storm damage.

The final recommended plans for each city, among a number studied, identify the amount of sand initially

place on each beach and the frequency and quantity to be placed in future years in order to protect the sandstone bluffs that meet the sea.

The preferred plan for Encinitas, called Alternative EN-1A, calls for an initial placement of 680,000 cubic yards of material, to be replenished at five-year intervals of 280,000 cubic yards, for a total placement of 3.2 million over the anticipated 50-year life of the project. The project will add about 100 feet of additional beach.

The preferred plan for Solana Beach is to initially place 960,000 cubic yards of sand and to renourish the area every 13 years with an additional 420,000 cubic yards of sand, for a total placement of 2.2 million over the anticipated 50-year life of the project. The project will add about 200 feet of additional beach.

Residents, surfers, business owners and environmentalists were among

those who requested the Corps to consider impacts the selected project could have on particular facets of life along the shoreline. Their comments will be incorporated into the Corps’s decision documents. The Corps will continue to accept written comments received before Feb. 28, Mr. Larry Smith, Planning Division, US Army Corps of Engineers, PO Box 532711, Los Angeles, CA 90053-2325, or email Lawrence.J.Smith@usace.army.mil

Additional information on the project is available at <http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ProjectsStudies/SolanaEncinitasShorelineStudy.aspx>

The Los Angeles District is scheduled to present the plan to the Corps’ Civil Works Review Board for approval in June, with a decision by the Chief of Engineers in September.



Wave action at the foot of the sandstone bluffs caves out notches that reduce the stability of the bluffs and present a potential life-threatening situation for beach-goers. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)

District hosts USACE Environmental Advisory Board Members

By Daniel J. Calderon

PHOENIX — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Arizona-Nevada Area Office hosted members of the USACE Headquarters' Environmental Advisory Board during a two-day visit to the Phoenix area Feb. 13 and 14.

"I know you're all experts in your respective fields, and I'm excited to have you all here," said Col. Mark Toy, the LA District commander, as he greeted the members. "I'm really glad you're here because you are going to see the crown jewel out here. That's the Tres Rios Ecosystem Restoration Project."

None of the eight board members are members of the Corps of Engineers. The Board was created by the Chief of Engineers, Lieutenant General Frederick J. Clarke, in 1970, to give outside, expert and independent advice on environmental issues facing the Corps of Engineers. Throughout its history, the Board has served the Corps as a vehicle of communication to reach out and build partnerships, understandings and cooperation with the Environmental community, and public at large.

"I think it's great that they came here to see the work we have done," said Mike Ternak, the Sustainable Engineering Program Manager for South Pacific Division. Ternak is based in Phoenix. "They can take what they see up to the Headquarters level and let the right people know about the initiatives we've started here, and they can apply a lot of the lessons we have learned here to projects around the Corps."

The members visited several environmental restoration projects throughout Phoenix during their time in the Valley of the Sun. One project was the Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area. The Corps of Engineers became involved with the project in the 1990s when the City of Phoenix requested a restoration study of the Salt River. The Corps worked with the City of Phoenix to revitalize the river corridor. Today, the area hosts more than 200 species of migratory birds and has an array of recreational options for residents and visitors.

On the second day of their visit, the members of the Board had the opportunity to see the "crown jewel" project in the Phoenix area -- the Tres Rios Ecosystem Restoration Project in Phoenix's West Valley. The project uses highly-treated effluent from the 91st Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant to create nearly 500 acres of wetland. The project also consists of a flood protection levee, effluent pump station and riparian corridors for native species. The project is ongoing,



Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Advisory Board and other USACE team members visit the flow-regulating wetlands at the Tres Rios Environmental Restoration Project Feb. 14. (USACE photo by Daniel J. Calderon)

pending funding. The City of Phoenix is working on putting in the passive recreational aspects, so the general public can use the trails in the overbank wetlands area.

Their final destination was Luke Air Force Base. There, the group met with Lt. Col. Chad Bondurant, the commander of 56th Civil Engineer Squadron, 56th Fighter Wing and members of his staff. They had the chance to view the work the LA District is doing on the base in preparation for the arrival of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The team also had the chance to visit the site of an archeological excavation on the base.

The excavation came about when the base was planning to put in a solar array. Shortly after beginning the study on the site, the Luke team discovered a site they said is of great significance to Arizona and the nation. The site, according to archaeologists, contains human dwellings dating back to 3,000 BC. Archaeologists say the area shows signs of the shift from a hunter-gatherer society to one based in agriculture and represents a "seminal period" in human development.

"I know you have all seen some pretty amazing projects during your tours," Toy said as the EAB members returned to the Area Office for their working meeting on Valentine's Day. "I want to thank you for coming, for taking your time, and I'm glad you were able to get a better understanding of just how much these folks out here in Arizona do for the Corps and for the country."

The team also participated in a public meeting Feb. 15 with USACE Commanding General Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick in downtown Phoenix.

Safety Assurance Reviews improve projects

By Chadi Wahby

LOS ANGELES — From dams to levees to river channel improvements to environmental restoration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Engineering Division has designed them all. One of the main purposes for these projects is flood risk management, and the projects are genuinely relied upon by the people they help protect.

Projects carrying such responsibility must be planned, designed and constructed properly.

Engineering Circular EC 1165-2-209, Civil Works Review Policy, published Jan. 31, 2010, provides the process for review of all Civil Works projects. The latest version, released last December, establishes an accountable and comprehensive life-cycle review strategy for Civil Works products, as well as procedures for ensuring the quality and credibility of all Corps

construction decisions.

In general, the Civil Works policy includes an internal review in the District by a team representing many disciplines, an external review by a similar group within the Corps but outside the District, and a third review focused on safety by an independent group of technical experts who do not work for the Corps.

As an example, the Santa Ana River Mainstem flood risk management project is comprised of many projects, including the completed construction of Seven Oaks Dam, the increase in basin capacity and outlet release capabilities of the Prado Dam, and improvements to the Lower Santa Ana River. Reach 9 of the Lower Santa Ana River is a portion of the project, located just downstream of the Prado Dam, starting at the Prado outlet in the City of Corona and ending at Weir Canyon Road in the City of Yorba Linda. It's a 40-minute drive southeast of

downtown Los Angeles.

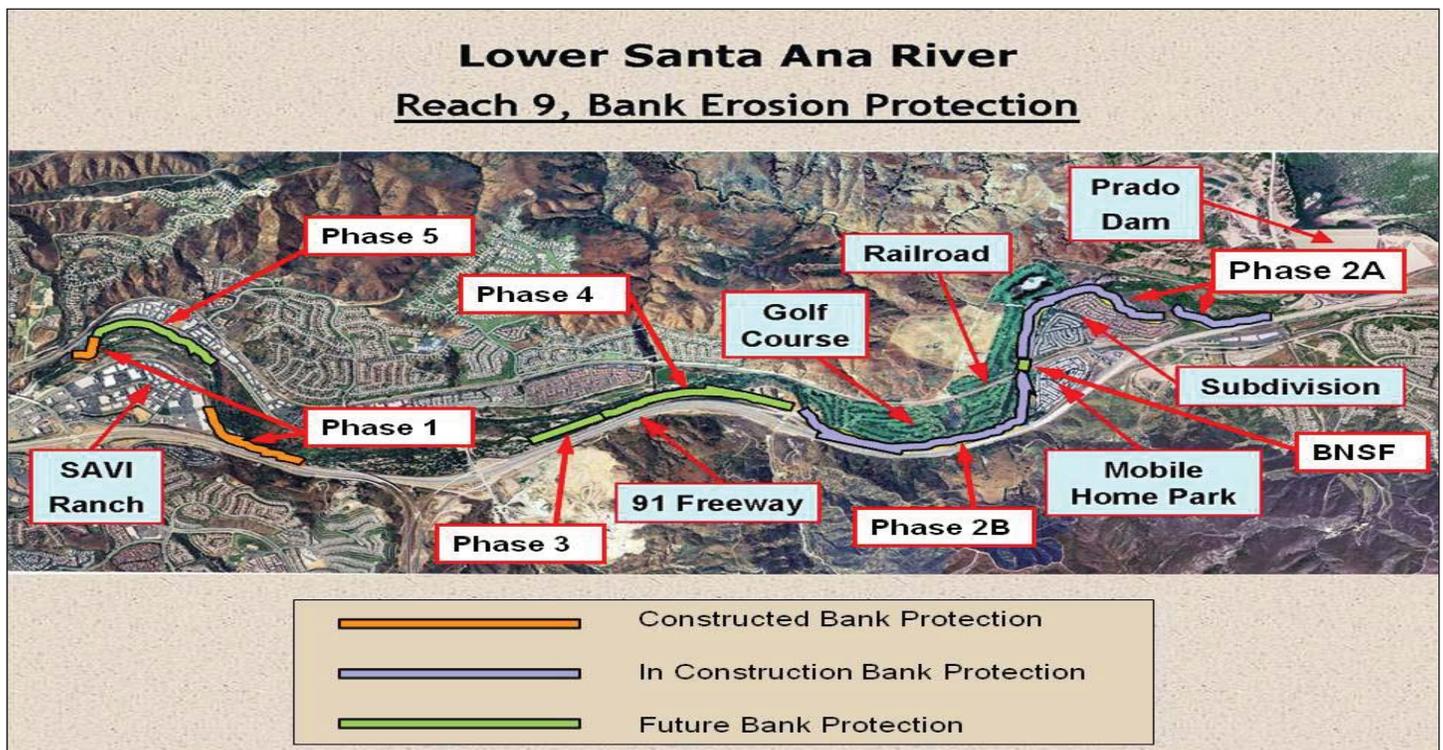
Due to a planned water release design increase from 10,000 to 30,000 cubic feet per second, the river banks in Reach 9 need protection based on thorough planning and analysis.

Per the EC, the designs for Reach 9 of the Lower Santa Ana River Channel project are required to undergo a Safety Assurance Review and are currently being reviewed by a team of expert engineers from Schnabel Engineering, an architectural engineering firm from West Chester, Pa.

The Safety Assurance Review is conducted for flood risk management projects, as well as other projects where potential hazards pose a significant threat to human life.

The Safety Assurance Review begins during the design process, continues throughout the construction phase, and includes operations and maintenance documentation. Each review includes

— see SAFETY, Page 9 —



An exhibit map shows the location and different phases of the Lower Santa Ana River Channel Reach 9 projects. The phases are in different stages of the construction process. The current status is: Phase 1 (completed), Phase 2A (in construction), Phase 2B (in construction), Phase 3 (set to award Summer 2013), Phase 4 (in design), Phase 5 (in design), and the BNSF Railroad bridge protection (in design).

— SAFETY from Page 8 —

comments issued to the project delivery team of that specific phase using a computer program called “DrChecks.” The project delivery team then submits responses, and sometimes design changes, to those comments, in order to ensure quality and safe project design.

Due to Reach 9 projects being at different stages for completion, Safety Assurance Reviews will likely continue for at least a few years.

A Safety Assurance Review site visit involves a great deal of planning and requires a month to arrange. The site visit typically lasts the entire day and includes opening and closing remarks by Richard Leifield, Engineering Division chief, briefings by the design leads for each of the phases of work, discussion of pertinent topics or design comments and a visit to the project site to view construction operations.

The site visits take place about every six months and depend on certain features of work that Schnabel representatives feel are crucial to see as part of their review process. In addition to the Engineering Division Chief and project leads, branch chiefs, area office and resident office engineers, construction representatives, project sponsors, project delivery teams for each phase, South Pacific Division representatives, a Risk Management Center representative and Schnabel representatives attend. Overall, approximately 30 people attend, and eight or so government vehicles and volunteer drivers are arranged to transport the attendees to each of the project sites. The end result is a process that allows for a better quality and safe product that can help protect many residents from flood risks.



Grouted stone bank protection placement is part of Phase 2A of the Lower Santa Ana Bank Erosion Protection Project and is made of a two-foot-thick combination of stone and grout. (USACE photo by Chadi Wahby)



The Perennial Stream project (at left) is an environmental mitigation design that is part of the Phase 2B bank protection project and is intended to be a great habitat for plant and fish species found in the region. Grouted stone bank protection is also visible. (USACE photo)

USACE commanding general visits Phoenix

By Daniel J. Calderon

PHOENIX —

Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commanding general, attended the Feb. 15 public meeting of the USACE Environmental Advisory Board and visited the USACE Los Angeles District Arizona/Nevada Area Office to meet with local team members.

“My visit here had two main components,” Bostick said. “One, I met with the EAB. They do great work for the Corps of Engineers and for the nation by providing sound guidance in how we can be better stewards of the environment and of the taxpayers’ dollars. Two, I wanted to make sure I took the time to meet the great folks in the office here.”

The EAB meeting took place at the Federal Courthouse in downtown Phoenix. The board members gave Bostick their findings from the previous meeting and discussed their opinions of the projects in the Phoenix area.

“It was a very instructive two days,” said Dr. James Kundell, professor emeritus and retired director of the Environmental Policy Program at the University of Georgia’s Institute of Government. Kundell is the EAB Chairperson. “Seeing the Tres Rios project was very important and seeing the projects at Luke Air Force Base was a new experience for us. I know Corps Districts are very different from each other and that when we were coming, we should prepare for this to be different from any other District we had been to before.”

Kundell and the members of the EAB discussed the importance of the aquatic ecosystem restoration projects they toured and heaped praise upon Col. Mark Toy, the LA District commander, and members of his staff for



Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick, commanding general of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, speaks with Los Angeles District team members at the Arizona/Nevada Area Office during a lunch meeting held in the office Feb. 15. Bostick took time to answer questions from the team members and to give his vision for the direction of the Corps. He also spoke about how his vision relates to the local office. (USACE photo by Daniel J. Calderon)

their hospitality. Following the meeting, Bostick toured the Arizona/Nevada Area Office and spoke with District employees there.

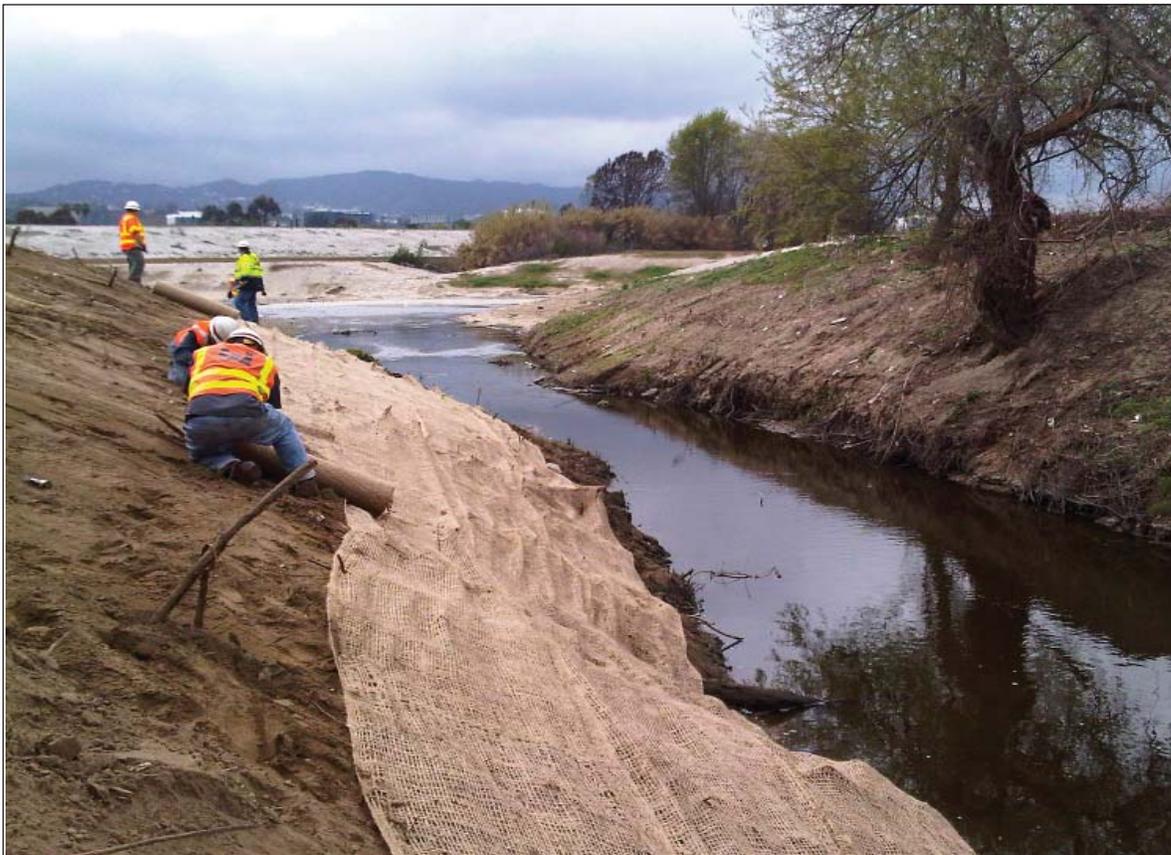
“This office is considered the model for how we can update the structure of Corps offices so we can make better use of our resources and so we can be as successful as you are here in Arizona,” said Bostick. “I was delighted to meet with the EAB and hear how glad they were to have seen the projects here. The EAB members were over-the-moon in their praise of the Arizona team’s work and their support during the visit.”

Bostick had planned to spend the last few hours of his time in Phoenix at the Tres Rios Ecosystem Restoration Project; however, a previous engagement curtailed that plan. He does have high hopes for the future, though.

“I’ve got to find a way to come back here to see that project,” he said. “Each of the board members had a lot to say about it and I have already heard so much. I’m sorry there’s not enough time for me to get out there.”

To read Lt. Gen. Bostick’s blog visit:
<http://usace.armylive.dodlive.mil/>

Project work resumes at Sepulveda Basin



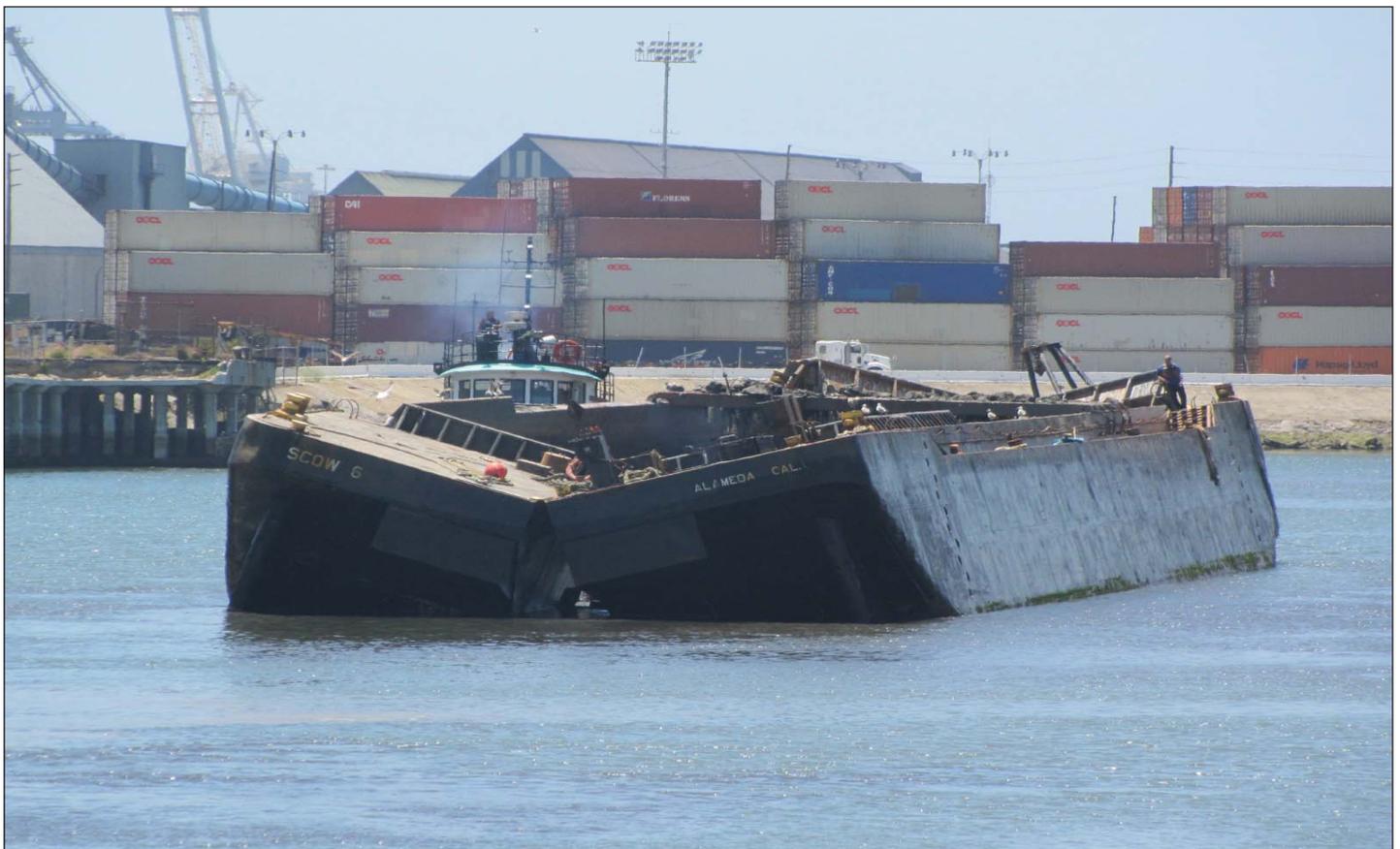
Crews roll out jute netting Feb. 19, as work resumed in the vegetation management area south of Burbank Boulevard at Sepulveda Dam Flood Control Basin. Erosion control measures were installed where vegetation was removed along the banks of Haskell Creek at the creek's confluence with the Los Angeles River; however, chipping and mulching of felled trees and limbs could not be accomplished due to the early start of the migratory bird nesting season. (USACE photo by Jay Field)

Lester Burwell, a maintenance worker in the Los Angeles District's operations branch, rolls out jute netting Feb. 19, as work resumed in the vegetation management area south of Burbank Boulevard at Sepulveda Dam Flood Control Basin. The work is part of the first phase of a three-phase, five-year project to convert the area to a more valuable and sustainable habitat that will improve flood risk management operations and enhance public safety. (USACE photo by Jay Field)



Lower Newport Harbor dredging concludes

On Feb. 7, R.E. Staite Engineering, a small business out of San Diego, concluded maintenance dredging of federal channels in the Newport Harbor. The \$9.6 million project, of which the City of Newport Beach contributed \$6.1 million, removed nearly 600,000 cubic yards of material from the channels, restoring them to their design depths of 10 to 20 feet. Staite delivered about 112,000 cubic yards of the material, using split barges (below), to a disposal site at the Port of Long Beach to assist with the construction of upgraded terminal facilities. (USACE photos by Scott John)



District helps improve LA-area recruiting efforts with new, joint recruiting center

By David A. Salazar

EL MONTE, Calif. — The Los Angeles District helped open the doors to the newest joint recruiting center in LA county in a ceremony in El Monte Feb. 26.

“This facility is an example of how the Corps of Engineers is ‘Building Strong and Taking Care of People,’ starting with our Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines, and our new recruits, who will play such a critical role in helping to maintain the strength of our Nation,” said Lt. Col. Alex Deraney, deputy commander of the Los Angeles District, during the ceremony.

The grand opening event, attended by recruiting command representatives from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, included a swearing-in ceremony, in which dozens of future Soldiers and Sailors reaffirmed their oaths of enlistment before a crowd of nearly a hundred civic leaders and members of the public.

The district’s Asset Management Division led the effort to open the space as part of a larger plan to help stand-alone U.S. Army recruiting centers and joint service recruiting centers reduce the number of facilities needed to conduct operations. The El Monte Recruiting Center is the nineteenth such facility of 20 total facilities that are due to open under the streamlining plan by April.

The new facility, which will support more than 20 military recruiters,



(Left to right) Janet Chin, representative from the office of Sen. Dr. Ed Hernandez; Lt. Col. Scott Peterson, commander of the Army’s Los Angeles Recruiting Battalion; Debra Mehndelson, a representative from LA supervisor Michael Antonovich’s office; Lt. Col. Alex Deraney, deputy commander of the LA District; Maj. Gen. Megan Tatu, commanding general of the 79th Sustainment Support Command; and, Navy Commander Michelle D. Carter, commanding officer of Navy Recruiting District Los Angeles, cut the ribbon commemorating the grand opening of the joint recruiting center in El Monte, Calif., Feb. 26. (USACE photo by David Salazar)

is nearly 5,500 square feet and encompasses four suites. Each of the three services the center supports – the Army, Navy, and Marines – have prominent display signage and branding, which helps support local recruiting efforts.

“The new center is in a much better location. It’s definitely above and beyond what we expected it to look like,” said Army Staff Sgt. Michael Richards, the assistant commander of the El Monte Recruiting Center. “It’s overall a much better representation of our Armed Forces and what we have to offer. It’s more inviting to the public and it’s a much better place for our recruiters to talk with parents and applicants.”

Army Maj. Gen. Megan Tatu, commanding general of the 79th

Sustainment Support Command, headquartered at the Los Alamitos Joint Forces Reserve Training Base, echoed Richards’ sentiments.

“Recruiting is where it all begins. Who knows? Walking through those doors for the first time might be the future sergeant major of the Army or possibly a future Medal of Honor recipient,” Tatu said. “Thank you very much to the Corps of Engineers for providing this great facility and upholding their motto of ‘Building Strong.’”

The Los Angeles District manages more than 250 recruiting station leases throughout Southern California, Arizona and Nevada, as part of the Department of Defense Recruiting Facilities Program. The leases are valued at more than \$30 million.

Tabata intervals can intensify workouts

By Cecelia “Cecy” Ordóñez

LOS ANGELES — Exercise can be boring when you are doing repetitive movements and discouraging when there are no results. If you are looking for a way to spice up your exercise, let Tabata training lead the way.

Tabata is a form of High Intensity Interval Training, a system of organizing high intensity cardio with a lower intensity active recovery period for a specified time; however, with Tabata the work to rest ratio has a specific time. It was founded by Professor Izumi Tabata, a former researcher at the National Institute for Health and Nutrition and currently a professor and researcher at Ritsumeikan University’s newly established Faculty of Sport and Health Science.

Dr. Tabata coined the term “Tabata training” when he was working with the Japanese speed skating team.

“Mr. Irisawa Koichi (head coach) had me analyze the effectiveness of his training regime that involved a rotation of short bursts of maximum effort followed by short periods of rest,” Tabata said.

The protocol analyzed was:

- 20 seconds of intense training
- 10 seconds of rest
- total of 8 sessions or rounds
- 4 minutes long (whole Tabata session)

Normally, when we exercise we are performing aerobic activity, a low-intensity exercise over a sustained period of time that has a constant supply of oxygen and is used to improve endurance, such as in running, swimming, cycling, etc. Conversely, anaerobic activity is a high-intensity exercise that is sustained for a few seconds or minutes without oxygen and is completed at

maximum effort to improve power and speed, such as sprinting or power lifting.

Dr. Tabata examined the effect of this protocol versus a traditional 60-minute, aerobic workout. The results were that the four-minute exercise group improved both aerobically and anaerobically, while the 60-minute group increased their aerobic capacity but not as much as the four-minute group, and they had no change in their anaerobic fitness. Tabata, therefore, draws on the advantage of both aerobic and anaerobic processes giving you all the fitness benefits of power, speed and endurance, particularly for people who want to improve conditioning and athletic performance.

The Tabata training method is an advanced form of exercise, and it requires you to be fit as well as mentally strong. To get started, you need a timer. If you have a smart phone, there are multiple free interval apps you can download. Next, pick your exercise(s). Examples include running, biking, or strengthening. You can also pick one exercise or vary each exercise per interval:

- Barbell Squats (intervals 1,5)
- Pushups (intervals 2,6)
- Chin ups (intervals 3,7)
- Sprinting in place (4,8)

Lastly, make sure you have all the exercise equipment you need already available before you start the timer. Tabata is a great workout when you are in a time crunch and is perfect for an elevated calorie burn at the end of your workout. This type of training is very taxing on the body, so make sure you properly warm up, cool down, rest the muscles used and provide your body with proper nutrition to get the results you want.

Activity, Nutrition, Sleep — key to peak performance

The Army Surgeon General has championed the Performance Triad of Activity, Nutrition and Sleep to build resilience, improve readiness and enhance the health of the Army family. Despite the growing research that shows sleep, like nutrition and physical activity, is vital for good health, many people, Soldiers and civilians, adults and children are not getting adequate amounts. Although individual sleep requirements vary, most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep daily, children and adolescents even more.

Sleep disorders and sleep

deprivation affect an estimated 70 million Americans annually and may increase your risk for stroke, obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other health conditions. Inadequate sleep may also be an indicator of other health-related issues such as post-traumatic stress, depression, chronic pain and may put you at risk for accidents or cause you to make mission-critical errors due to impaired judgment and decision-making.

Why is the study of sleep important to the Army? The study of sleep, sleep disorders and their treatment is essential for the Army to remain a ready

and resilient fighting force.

For Soldiers and the Army family, quality sleep is a major component for optimal mental performance and essential for health promotion, wellness and disease prevention.

What continued efforts does the Army have planned for the future?

The Army and Army Medicine will continue to encourage Soldiers, family members and civilians to incorporate health-promoting behaviors and decisions into their daily lives. In 2013, the Army will conduct a Performance Triad pilot program to provide targeted education and materials.

District celebrates Black History Month



Keynote speaker, Lowell Morgan (above left) speaks to the district's workforce attending the Black Employment Special Emphasis Program Committee's Black History Month kick-off ceremony held at the district conference room Feb. 4 in Los Angeles, Calif. Col. Mark Toy (far right), District commander, and Arnecia Williams, BEP program manager, present Lowell Morgan with an award for his participation in the program. (USACE photos by Richard Rivera)

By Brooks O. Hubbard IV

LOS ANGELES — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Black Employment Special Emphasis Program committee held its Black History Month observance kick-off ceremony at the District's headquarters Feb. 4.

"At the crossroads of Freedom and Equality: The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington," is this year's theme.

The theme commemorates two events that changed the course of the nation—the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the 1963 March on Washington.

President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 opened the door for African Americans to join the Army and to fight to reunite a divided country.

"There were great role models in the Army, African-American role models, who helped shape who I am today," said Col. Mark Toy, District commander of

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District. "When you look at now the success of African-Americans in the Army, it [success] starts at the top within the Corps of Engineers, with Lt. Gen. Bostick an African-American who is leading the Corps," Toy said.

The March on Washington that occurred on Aug 28, 1963 became famous for the three-hour long program that gathered more than 200,000 Americans, amongst them were civil rights activists, celebrities and religious leaders, who called for racial equality, jobs and freedom. The rally culminated in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

"The March on Washington was not the end of the struggle, but the beginning," said Lowell Morgan, this year's BHM keynote speaker. "The beginning of what?" asked Morgan. "To move this country to a point where it was realized and recognized of its true meaning of its creed, that all men were, in fact, created equal."

Morgan is a native of Okmulgee,

Okla. and is currently the Most Worshipful Grand Master of The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, State of California, Inc.

"The kick-off ceremony for the African-American and Black History Month observance was fulfilling," said Arnecia Williams, a value engineer and BEP program manager. "Mr. Morgan brought awareness and real-life experiences to his speech on the March on Washington and discussion of the Emancipation Proclamation. It's great when an event like this brings together employees of all races and cultures to learn about US history."

The ceremony continued with a dramatic reading by Stephanie Hall, BEP program member, highlighting excerpts from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

A "Soul Food" luncheon is slated for later this month in observance of the remembrance.

Be kind, but be **SAFE** in the process

By Steve McCombs

LOS ANGELES — This is not normally a Safety subject, per se, but I felt the need to write about it since it became very personal to me about a month ago.

While recently watching the news I heard a very disturbing story. A woman and her child were shopping at one of the large warehouse stores when she was approached by a man who said he was very ill and needed a ride to the hospital. The woman agreed, but when they got outside it turned out to be a robbery/kidnapping. Another man joined the first and they demanded money. She didn't have any. They then demanded she go to an ATM. Her account was essentially empty, so these men made her go into the store and buy two iPads on her credit card. In fear, she complied and the men then took the iPads. Fortunately, they let her and the child go after the theft. The store security cameras had pictures of the two men and they will hopefully be arrested and prosecuted.

A similar event recently happened to my 96-year-old mother. She was shopping at the grocery store when a woman asked her for help. She said she needed a ride home with her groceries because she had walked to the store, but recognized my Mom as one of her neighbors. My mother obliged her, but as Mom was loading her own groceries in the trunk the woman loaded hers into the back seat, stealing Mom's wallet during the process. Mom did not know it was gone until that

evening. Her credit card company called her about suspicious activity and the local police became involved. Fortunately the grocery store had good security cameras as well, and the local police were able to arrest the woman within a few days. It turns out they were already looking for this woman and she now faces multiple charges. But the damage was done. Mom has to get new everything – credit cards, driver's license, etc. She has to go to a police lineup and then to court for the criminal trial. I hope this criminal spends a good, long time in jail.

The following URL is for the National Crime Prevention Council and provides a wide variety of information; take some time to give it a look: <http://www.ncpc.org/>

When people ask me for help, strangers or not, I will give it if I am able. Some of this comes from having been a Hospital Corpsman while I was in the Navy, and some of it comes from the position of, "it's the right thing to do." But one must also be a bit wary; some folks will take advantage of your kindness. Had my mom offered to pay for a cab ride, I am guessing the woman would have made some excuse and left her alone. As to the woman who was forced to buy the iPads, she should have notified store security right away when she was first approached.

President Reagan had a saying about the nuclear arms talks with the old Soviet Union; "trust, but verify." So, be kind to others, but be cautious. And, as always, drive safe, drive sober and buckle up!! — *Safety Steve*



Matchmaking session held in District

By Kristen Skopect

LOS ANGELES — More than a dozen employees interested in finding a mentor rotated through a speed-dating style, mentoring-matchmaking process at the Los Angeles District office Feb. 13.

The first-of-its-kind event resulted from a brainstorming session among members of the Mentoring Program's Mentoring Team, made up of individuals who volunteer their time to support the program and work to ensure the program stays relevant.

"The challenge was how to bring people together to meet potential mentors or associates that they would otherwise not have a chance to meet," said Mentoring Champion Danny Carrasco, who helps make sure the team has the resources and level of attention the program needs to succeed.

Having the event close to Valentine's Day and recognizing the popularity of the speed-dating concept, the Mentoring Team rallied to festively decorate a room and create speed-dating rules to best match mentors and associates.

According to Carrasco, the goal of the session and the overall program is to improve relationships and communication pathways between all levels of employees. He said the Mentoring Team continuously works to increase the active number of participants, as well as provide resources to assist in building and maintaining those relationships.

"The matchmaking mentoring session was a valuable experience for me, because I was able to select a mentor and build new relationships outside my division," said Noemi Rodriguez, Department of the Army intern. "Aside from having the advantage of going to my selected mentor for guidance, I am now comfortable to visit and ask for guidance from all the other mentors who attended the event."

"The program currently has approximately 30 participating pairs, but it has had more than 40 pairs in the past," Carrasco said.



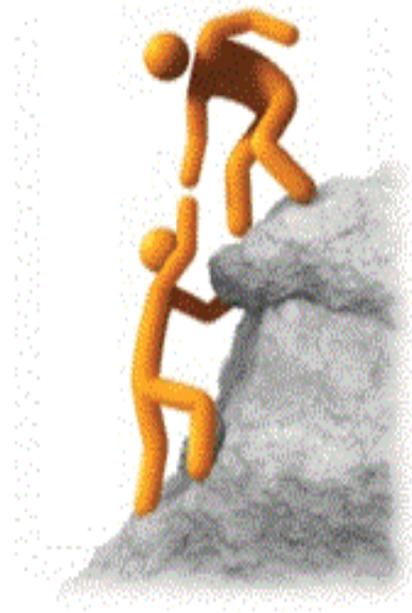
Employees Noemi Rodriguez (front left) and Jonathan Machorro (back left) meet mentors Norman Boeman (front right) and Ned Araujo (back right) speed-dating style during a mentoring-matchmaking process at the Los Angeles District office Feb. 13. (USACE photo by Kristen Skopect)

The Mentoring Program was formalized in the District in 2008. The general rules of the program indicate mentoring can be formal and informal and will occur with a senior or experienced employee as the mentor. The formal type involves scheduled meeting dates and times, due-outs or possible homework, and short and long-term goals. The informal type involves flexible meeting dates and times, as well as short and long-term goals.

"Employees shouldn't worry if they missed the speed-dating session, because they can contact Kelli Johnson or Tomas Beauchamp if interested in the program," Carrasco added.

Carrasco said he was impressed by the hard work and creativity of the District's Mentoring Team, which includes the following people: Harold Hartman, Anne Hutton, Sallie McGuire, Heather Schlosser, Chad Allen, Reuben

Sasaki, Alison Lind, Kathy Corntassel and Noemi Rodriguez.



Employees urged to review beneficiaries

By Liza Rosa

The beginning of a new year is a good time for employees to assess benefits-related items. It is particularly important to review and update any designation of beneficiary forms on file, and most employees will have four types of beneficiary forms.

For starters, the designation of beneficiary for the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Program is Standard Form 2823 and is used to indicate who will receive FEGLI benefits in the event of an employee's death. Next, the designation of beneficiary for Unpaid Compensation of Deceased Civilian Employee, SF 1152, is used to indicate who will receive the unpaid compensation payable after an employee's death. Unpaid compensation can include the final pay check and lump sum annual leave payment. The SF 2823 and 1152 must be filled out hard-copy and are only considered valid once signed by human resources and filed in the employee's Official Personnel Folder.

The third designation of beneficiary form is for the Thrift Savings Plan, form TSP-3, and is used to designate the recipient(s) of a deceased employee's TSP

account. The TSP-3 form is found on the TSP website, www.tsp.gov. Once completed, it should be returned to the TSP office that will retain the form on file.

The last designation of beneficiary form is for the Civil Service Retirement System, SF 2808, and Federal Employees Retirement System, SF 3102. Both pertain to retirement contributions for an employee's respective retirement plan. For eligible, married employees the contributions paid into the retirement account will first be used to provide a monthly survivor benefit to a surviving spouse. The designation would then only be used to determine any lump sum benefits payable if there is no surviving spouse or the surviving spouse passes away prior to depleting the funds in the account.

For other employees, the designation serves the same purpose as other beneficiary forms, the lump sum payment of the retirement fund. CSRS employees must send the SF 2808 directly to OPM. The address is located in the instructions for the form. FERS employees may give the SF 3102 to their human resources office for filing in their personnel folder. Both forms are only valid once received by Office of Personnel Management or the employee's Civilian Personnel Advisory Center.

Around the District

people skills

Col. Mark Toy (right), the Los Angeles District commander, and David Van Dorpe, the LA District's Deputy District Engineer for Programs and Project Management, presented Staff Sgt. Michelle Butler, an administrative assistant with the executive office, the Army Commendation Medal for her efforts to energize and focus the staff for greater efficiency from February 2012 to February 2013. (USACE photo by Richard Rivera)



BUILDING STRONG® and *Taking Care of People!*

Around the District - continued...



two thumbs-up

Commander Col. Mark Toy and Deputy District Engineer for Programs and Project Management David Van Dorpe announce Veronica Chan, project manager, as employee of the quarter from October to December 2012. Chan completed the environmental review and processing of 2,600 Nationwide Permit verifications and worked closely with applicants and various federal and state agencies. Meanwhile, she led a statewide project delivery team on Clean Water Act, Section 404, permitting for the 800-mile California High-Speed Rail project. (USACE photo by Richard Rivera)

professional pride

An Achievement Medal for Civilian Service was presented to Michael Cogan, safety and health specialist, for the period of June 2 to Nov. 30, 2012 for his stellar service as the Acting Chief and ensuring the District met its safety and occupational health mission requirements. (USACE photo by Dave Palmer)



An Achievement Medal for Civilian Service was presented to Cecilia Ordonez, health and fitness coordinator, for the period of November 2011 to November 2012 for her outstanding support to the USACE Fit-to-Win program, which teaches health and fitness lifestyle adjustments for employees. (USACE photo by Richard Rivera)



The Commander's Award for Civilian Service was presented to Jennie Ayala, outreach specialist, for the period of September 2008 to December 2012 for excellent public affairs support and advice to District leadership, which helped shape the positive public perception of the District. (USACE photo by Richard Rivera)



An Achievement Medal for Civilian Service was presented to Dave Palmer, public affairs specialist, for the period of April 4, 2011 to Feb. 1, 2012 for outstanding work in the public affairs office, to include expert editing of the District's monthly newsletter and superb reporting on USACE issues. (USACE photo by Richard Rivera)

BUILDING STRONG® and Taking Care of People!

Women STEM pioneers celebrated in March

By Phyllis Trabold, Special Emphasis Program Manager

Do you know the name of the first female physician or the first female forester hired by the U.S. Forest Service?

The theme for the 2013 National Women's History Month, "Women Inspiring Innovation Through Imagination: Celebrating Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics" focuses on achievements by women who have accomplished impressive feats in STEM fields. Women have tremendous opportunity today, as compared to the challenges faced by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and Margaret Stoughton Abell (the answers to my opening question). By reading their stories, maybe today's women will be encouraged to consider a STEM career.

Dr. Gertrude Theresa Cori • Biochemist, First American female Nobel Laureate (1896-1957)— She entered the Medical School of the German University of Prague and received the Doctorate in Medicine in 1920. Born in the Czech Republic, she emigrated to the United States and became an American citizen in 1928.



Dr. Cori was appointed a Professor of Biochemistry in 1947 at the Washington University in St. Louis. She studied the fate of sugar in the animal body and the effects of insulin and epinephrine. Dr. Cori received many honors, such as the Garvan Medal (1948), the St. Louis Award (1948), the Sugar Research Prize (1950), and the Borden Award (1951). She was the first American woman to win a Noble prize (Physiology or Medicine 1947).

Margaret Stoughton Abell • Forester (unk)— Stoughton was the first female forester hired by the U.S. Forest Service. In June 1930, after graduating with a forestry degree from Iowa State College, she joined the staff of the Appalachian Forest Experiment Station in Asheville, N.C. as a Junior Forester. For seven years she worked on many projects conducted at the Station. A skilled photographer, many of her photographs are stored in the USDA's Bent Creek Forest Experiment archives. In 1933, she published an article titled "A Glimpse of the Appalachian Forest Experiment Station" in *The Ames Forester*. Included in the editor's note was, "Can a woman fill the position of a man in the field of forestry? Her field is no doubt limited in this role, but in research work Margaret Abell has proven beyond all doubt to her associates that she is capable."

Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell • Physician (1821-1910)— Born in England, Blackwell's family moved to America in 1832, and she once said, "The idea of winning a doctor's degree gradually assumed the aspect of a great moral struggle, and the moral fight possessed immense attraction for me." The students at her medical college voted on whether or not to admit her. She graduated first in her class in 1849.



Having difficulty renting a medical office she purchased a home and used it for her medical practice. She eventually became an American citizen. Blinded in one eye, she gave up her plan to be a surgeon and published several books on medicine.

Dr. Sally Kristen Ride • Astronaut, Physicist (1951-2012)— NASA accepted her as the first female astronaut for the space program in 1978. She was a crew member on the Challenger mission five years later. A graduate of Stanford University, she earned a doctorate in physics. She wrote science books for children and was the president of her company.



Ride recalled in a NASA interview for the 25th anniversary of her flight in 2008, "On launch day, there was so much excitement and so much happening around us in crew quarters, even on the way to the launch pad." "I didn't really think about it that much at the time, but I came to appreciate what an honor it was to be selected to be the first to get a chance to go into space."

Julia Morgan • Architect (1872-1957)— In 1904, Julia Morgan obtained her license to practice architecture from the State of California. She worked on several architectural designs at UC Berkeley before opening her own office. One of her earliest commissions was North Star House in Grass Valley, California (1906). In 1919, William Randolph Hearst chose Morgan as his architect for La Cuesta Encantada, (Hearst Castle). She also designed buildings for the YWCA and Mills College. Julia Morgan was inducted into the California Hall of Fame, located at The California Museum for History, Women and the Arts.

Elinor Ostrum • Economist (1933-2012)— She decided to attend college because students at her high school were expected to, although no one in her immediate family had attended college. After earning her undergraduate degree from UCLA she was shocked when job interviewers enquired about her shorthand and typing skills. From her autobiography: "I think my experience of obtaining a very good job in my early twenties helped me later when I decided to think about attending graduate-level courses and eventually applying for a research assistantship and admission to a Ph.D. program. I learned not to take initial rejections as being permanent obstacles to moving ahead."



Although UCLA discouraged her pursuit of a Ph.D. they admitted her. Her career path lead her to into the field of common-pool resources. She received her Nobel Prize in 2009 (Economic Science) which she shared with a professor from the University of California. The first woman to receive a Nobel Prize in Economics, she was on Time Magazine's list of 100 most influential people in 2012.

Engineering students exposed to Corps

at **UCLA**



Representing the District at the UCLA Engineering Job Fair Feb. 5 were (left to right) Jonathan Machorro, Matthew Gonzalez and Charles Dwyer, who spoke to UCLA students about how the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is actively hiring talented and motivated people. Current job openings can be found on the Office of Personnel Management's website at: <http://www.USAJobs.gov>. (USACE photo by Hayley Lovan)

at **USC**

Corps employees (left to right) Matthew Gonzalez, Alison Lind and Andrew Bondor attend the University of Southern California's Engineering Job Fair Feb. 6 and engage with potential future applicants. Team Leader Charles Dwyer (not pictured) said, "The Recruitment Team was there to inform students about what the Corps does and how the Pathways Program, now used to hire students and recent graduates, works." (USACE photo by Charles Dwyer)



BUILDING STRONG® and *Taking Care of People!*

To find information about work with the District, visit: <http://www.spl.usace.army.mil/Careers.aspx>

A little random can be a good thing

By Daniel J. Calderon

PHOENIX — There are times I like to try and go with some deep thoughts about the ebb and flow of humanity and the tides with which it rides throughout life and the universe. There are times I ponder perpetually perplexing possibilities (alliteration, I know. For some reason, it keeps popping up) and try to come up with some feasible solutions. There are times I try to see the best there is of our mortal condition and use that to inspire my legions (yes, this is my world and it's in my head. I recommend you stay out of it for your own good) of readers on the internet and around the world.

Then, there are times I think of what Shane Falco (played with a modicum of skill by Keanu Reeves) said in “The Replacements.”

“I would say something classy and inspirational,” he began, “but that’s just not our style.”

That’s kind of how I’m feeling right now. I’d love to feel classy and inspirational. But, there are times – like today – when that’s just not my style.

I’m feeling pretty much like going over random things. Like pedicures. Who decided they were only for women and unmanly? Granted, I don’t think getting toenails painted is too cool; but, I think it’s because that’s how I was raised. Plus, I don’t see the point in doing it since I only wear boots and the whole thing would be a waste of effort. I’ve done it once and thought it was rather an interesting sensation to have a massage-type treatment for my feet. I kind of neglect them the rest of my life, except for washing them when I shower and putting on shoes and socks to protect them from the day’s perils.

I think people who are so concerned about the “proper” forms of recreation for “real men” would likely have issues with a man watching “Titanic” and actually enjoying it. That doesn’t mean I loved the movie; but, there were some entertaining moments. For example, when I watched it with my wife at the IMAX (yeah, we’d seen it already; but she wanted to see it on the really, really

big screen), it got to the part when Rose discovers Jack is a corpsicle and she shoves him off the little door she was perched on. The crowd was hushed with only intermittent sobs breaking the stillness. I turned lovingly to my wife and whispered (at least a whisper was my intention), “Hey look. It’s Jack Frost.” That was my favorite part.

Notions of proper parenting that have come out in the last several years sometimes confuse me. When did spanking fall out of vogue? I understand beating children has been a no-no for some time now and I’m in total agreement. But, what is wrong with an occasional swat to the backside of one’s own kid? I remember my entire family (just the grown-ups, mind you) were allowed to spank me if I got out of line and they saw it. And that’s on top of the nuns who regularly took a ruler to me (to be fair – sort of – I was the kid who always asked the questions the other kids were too afraid to ask, so that might have been seen as impudent back then) in school.

Did I spank my kids? Yes, I did. When they were little, I did spank them on occasion, and I let them know what they had done to warrant the punishment and what they could do to stave it off in the future. It wasn’t an all-or-nothing prospect. I would use spankings, talking and getting louder with them. It depended on the situation. And there was none of this “I’ll call Child Protective Services on you” business neither when I was a kid nor when my little ones were younger. The notion that a government agency could come into our house and take our kids because we spanked them was – and still is – completely ludicrous.

What about the whole “50 Shades of Grey” thing? I’ve slogged through the book – and slogging, mentally speaking, is really the only way I can describe the process of getting from the beginning to the end. It was the mental equivalent of how I imagine Andy Dufresne (from “The Shawshank Redemption”) felt as he crawled to freedom.

The erotic fiction genre is replete with both good and bad fiction. My

mom used to read romance novels when I was younger. As an avid reader of almost any book that came to hand, I read some

of the books she had on her shelves. Most of them were drivel; but, I pushed through just to get to the end. And, being very young, I thought the stories were actually erotic.

The “Shades” book was horrible. It reads like the diary of a semi-literate high schooler. I can’t understand how so many people heaped so much praise on it. I actually felt like I lost IQ points reading it. I’m afraid my vocabulary might have actually decreased as a result of my plodding through the barely-there characterizations and inane dialogue (both internal and external) from the protagonist. I think the book (and very likely the whole trilogy) profited from word of mouth, low expectations and titillation.

Don’t get me wrong, though. I’ve read “The Story of O,” and it was an entertaining read. I don’t think the subject matter was the problem. I didn’t really expect “War and Peace.” I’m definitely not that much of a literary elitist. I love reading a good Stephen King or Terry Brooks, or even one of “The Destroyer” (a very entertaining series of books; but, don’t go in expecting highbrow stuff). Expect some fun action books and you’ll be alright.

There’s a lot of stuff going on in this crazy little world we all share. Some of it is good. Some is not so good. But, all of it that touches us does, in some way, affect how we view ourselves and how we view each other. If you’re very lucky, there’s at least one friend with whom you can share anything. I truly wish I had someone like that of my own. Oh well. I have the therapy of the written word. That’ll do, Life. Just a thought...



Women's History Month

WOMEN

inspiring
INNOVATION

through
IMAGINATION:

Celebrating Women

in Science,
Technology,
Engineering
and Mathematics