

# TOWER TIMES

August/September 2021

WELCOME COLONEL CURRY

PRIORITIES ON OUR PEOPLE

CHANGE OF COMMAND

AROUND THE  
DISTRICT



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers** ®  
Rock Island District



#### Mission

The Rock Island District's mission is to deliver vital engineering and water resource solutions in collaboration with our partners to secure our Nation, reduce disaster risk and enhance quality of life, providing value to the region and Nation.

#### Vision

A premier public service, engineering organization of trusted, talented professionals delivering innovative and sustainable solutions to the region and Nation.

**Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District**  
Col. Jesse T. Curry

**Deputy Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District**  
Lt. Col. John Fernas

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#### Disclaimer

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# TOWER TIMES

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#### *On the Cover*

During the change of command ceremony July 23, Col. Jesse T. Curry addresses the crowd for the first time as the Rock Island District commander. *Photo by Kelcy Hanson*

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# COMMANDER'S COMMENTS

## *Welcome to the Rock Island District*

**G**reetings to all teammates, partners, family, and friends of the Rock Island District. It is my distinct honor and privilege to serve as the 50th District Engineer and commander of this historic organization. In the few weeks since joining the team, I have been absolutely blown away by how important your contributions to the mission are to the nation and the wide variety of what the collective teams deliver day after day, year after year. I recognize (and have been kindly reminded) that District Commanders come and go, but the true value that the District brings to the region and the nation is the hundreds of dedicated and talented civilian professionals of numerous disciplines serving as its strong foundation. THANK YOU for the talent and dedication that make this the BEST district in the Corps of Engineers!

I also want to give thanks to the Public Affairs team that provides this publication for our workforce and partners. In future editions, I look forward to using this editorial space to provide input and updates that give insight into the nationally strategic impact of the Rock Island District. I will also look for opportunities to address top issues and concerns that apply to the entire team and their families when those topics arise. Most of all I am thankful for this as another opportunity to express sincere gratitude on behalf of the entire command for both the hard work we see around us every single day and the hard work we all know is going on at the outstretches of the district or behind the scenes. So, before I go any further in this edition, please let me simply say THANK YOU!

Over the past several Commanders, I'm sure "guided" by command all very well-intentioned optimally effective. As I and vision I would like to be shared and embraced that means that from my building, all the way to location in the district, it that speaks to the heart our mission, and our to serving our nation our families and future. categorize and align the threads throughout each

selfless service, commitment to what the TEAM can accomplish far beyond any one individual's efforts, and mutual trust and respect for each other regardless of our place within the organization. Without those threads binding our efforts together, this district would fall short of everything good that it could achieve for our team, the region, and the nation.

As we look forward to the challenges in front of us, I could not be more confident in the capability of the Rock Island District to achieve solutions that absolutely deliver for ALL those who depend on our service for their livelihood, their environment, their safety, and protection, their recovery after a disaster,



**Col. Jesse T. Curry**  
District Commander

**“ I consider it my mission to honor the grace given to me by making a positive difference whenever, wherever, and for whomever, I can. ”**

years and several District that the team has been philosophies of all types, but not necessarily all consider what priorities provide to the district, it is it to be effective, it must across the entire team. seat in the clocktower the most remote job needs to be something of this district, our people, collective commitment while we provide for Regardless of how we priorities, the common will be a dedication to

*Continued on page 4*

## COMMANDER COMMENTS (Cont.)

and their enhanced quality of life. The foundation of my confidence is 155 years (if you go back to August 3rd, 1866 as our starting point) of this district being a “premier public service, engineering organization of trusted, talented professionals delivering innovative and sustainable solutions to the region and Nation.” Although this district has many amazing facilities and structures that have been built during that time, the true value of this district has always been and will continue to be the PEOPLE. The members of the Rock Island District (past, present, and future) will always be our top priority and greatest strength. No matter what challenges we have ahead, and we do have some big ones on the horizon, the solution will be our PEOPLE and this TEAM.

In conclusion, I want to say again how honored I am to be given this privilege to serve as the Commander of the Rock Island District. My greatest motivation for service to others is the fact that I have continually been blessed with immeasurably more than I’ve earned or deserve. I consider it my mission to honor the grace given to me by making a positive difference whenever, wherever, and for whomever, I can. That has always been my motivation and as I continue to meet the great members of the Rock Island Team, it is no wonder that this District feels like the place I am meant to be. I hope to help everyone associated with the Rock Island District experience the same sense of teamwork, comradery, and as we say in the Corps of Engineers, esprit de corps.

Thank you to all our Rock Island District Team Members, Community Partners, and Regional Leaders for everything YOU do to make a positive difference for our Nation.

CONTINUE BUILDING STRONG!  
Col Curry, #50

Post-script: I always benefit from hearing news, feedback, or concerns from the workforce. In addition to my open-door policy (in the office, email, text, call, or commander’s corner), I am also willing to add on-location visits to the schedule if one or a group of individuals just needs to clear the air, bring something to my attention in person, or discuss something I’m doing or saying that just doesn’t make sense. Contact the Executive Office or me directly with any of those requests. 📧



### Last Month's Winner



Answer : Quad Cities heavy-lift crane control room  
Winner: Keith Senkbeil

### Can you name where this photo was taken?

If so, send your answer to [Kelcy.C.Hanson@usace.army.mil](mailto:Kelcy.C.Hanson@usace.army.mil) to be featured in the next issue of the Tower Times.



# SETTING PRIORITIES ON OUR PEOPLE

By Kelcy Hanson, Editor




When it comes to delivering value to the nation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers views safety, efficiency and accuracy as key elements in the process. Command Sgt. Maj. Patrickson Toussaint, 14th Command Sergeant Major to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is a major proponent of this theory and spends his days connecting with the workforce to identify gaps and develop solutions.

When Toussaint visited the Rock Island District earlier this year, his focus was on getting away from the District headquarters and meeting with the employees who work in the field. His primary role as Command Sergeant Major is to support the Chief of Engineers, Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon, by keeping him informed of employee concerns and challenges associated with their job duties. Toussaint took his time and visited multiple locations around the District including lock and dam sites, river project offices and lake projects. He spoke with as many employees as he could during his week-long visit.

“After much thought and discussion with leaders, it was clear that my philosophy is very simple,” said Toussaint. “PEOPLE – People are the most important part of the organization and we want to

make sure we are taking care of each of them.”

At each of the District sites, Toussaint elaborated on his ‘PEOPLE’ philosophy and how each letter of the word represented an imperative part of keeping USACE a world-class organization. He said each employee needs to have a Passion for their job, develop Empowerment and a positive attitude, take Ownership of their job and what they are asked to do, find their Purpose, be Loyal to their team and employees and have Empathy for one another.

Many in-depth, productive discussions were had during Toussaint’s visit and a variety of suggestions were brought to the table. As a result, a number of the suggestions have already been considered and improvements are underway. 



# COMMITMENT TO THE WORKFORCE LEADS TO STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

By Kelcy Hanson, Editor

In an effort to emphasize the importance of employee recognition and safety, Col. Curry committed to visiting every lock and dam and all lake project sites. During the visits, Col. Curry lauded the employees for their dedication to the mission and reiterated that he maintains an open door policy for all USACE employees.



Left: Starved Rock Lockmaster, Chris Rush, explains the differences of the lock and dam at Starved Rock compared to other locks on the Illinois Waterway. Right: Col. Curry presents Tony Schmelzer, maintenance worker at Coralville Lake, with a commander's coin for his top notch carpentry work in finding 'customized' ways to tackle unique problems. *Photos by Kelcy Hanson*



Left: Gordon Rush, Electronic Mechanic, assists the locks and dams on the Illinois Waterway by installing new fiber optic camera systems to better see and watch on-coming traffic. Right: Col. Curry receives a tour of the dam connected to the hydroelectric plant at Lake Red Rock by Laura Conrad, Natural Resource Specialist. *Photos by Kelcy Hanson*





**Col. Jesse Curry and Sarah Jones (left), Chief of Emergency Management visits with Vicki Stoller (center), Administrator for Two Rivers Levee & Drainage District. Col. Curry discusses how the District can continue working collaboratively with Two Rivers to provide safe and reliable flood risk management systems.**

*Photo by Jim Finn*



**Col. Curry standing on top of Lock and Dam 18 and receiving a detailed tour by Lockmaster, Mike Bielser.**

*Photo by Kelcy Hanson*



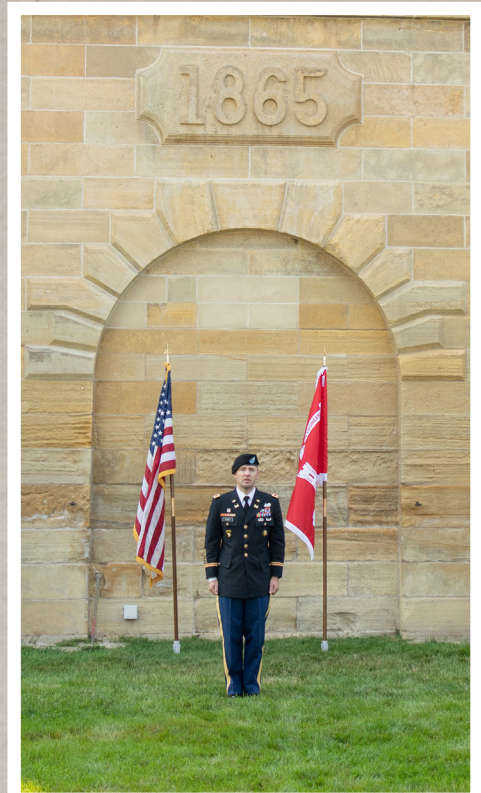
# CHANGE OF COMMAND

By Kelcy Hanson, Editor





**On July 23, 2021, Col. Jesse T. Curry became the 50th commander of the Rock Island District, assuming command from Col. Steven M. Sattinger who served in the position since May 24, 2018. The ceremony was held on the north lawn of the Rock Island District's Clock Tower Building and was attended by approximately 300 people including USACE employees, family members and local community leaders.**





# BUILDING A POSITIVE LOCK AND DAM REPAIR REPUTATION

By Kelcy Hanson, Editor

When the Rock Island District acquired its newest heavy-lift crane, the Quad Cities, a little more than two years ago, the Mississippi River Project Structures Maintenance crew knew it would be lifting a large workload in the District and beyond. Since its arrival, the crane and its crew have performed at least 25 lifts including several this past July in the St. Paul District at Lock and Dam 2 in Hastings, Minnesota, where the original miter gates from the 1940s needed to be replaced.

Over the past 80 years, miter gates like the ones at Lock and Dam 2 have endured an extensive amount of wear and tear, leading to serviceability and safety issues. Installation of new gates will increase navigational longevity and operational readiness in support of the economically significant navigation infrastructure.

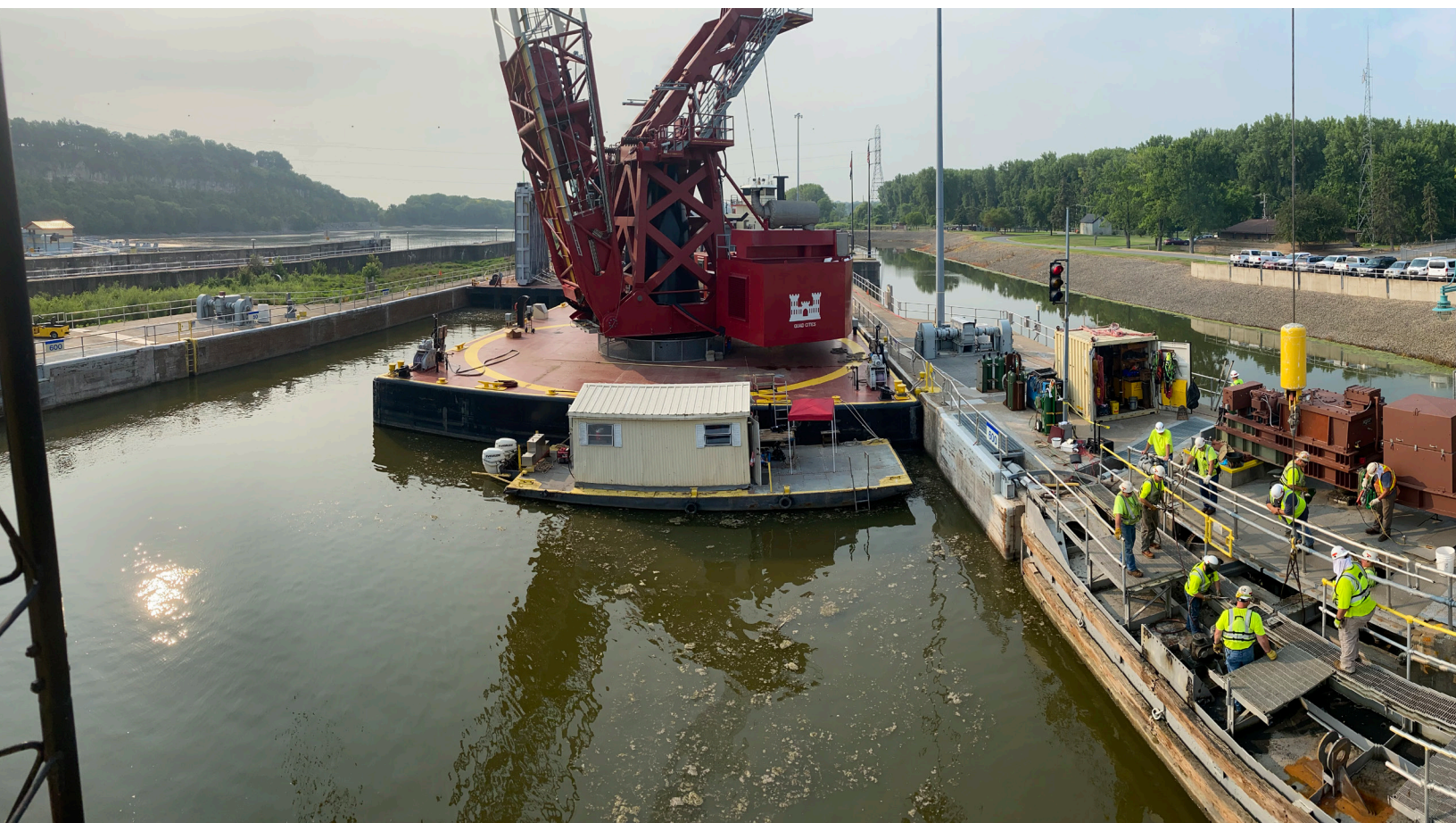
From the surface, miter gates might not appear to be a “heavy-lift” but below the water

line lies a massive metal structure which can only be removed by a large-scale crane like the Quad Cities. Installation of the new gates which stand 27 feet tall on the upstream side and 30 feet tall on the downstream side also requires strength and precision, especially since each gate weighs 256,000 and 266,000 pounds respectively.

“During the five weeks the Quad Cities was in Hastings, the job went great,” said Matt Thurman, Chief, Maintenance Section at Mississippi River Project Office. “I wish they all went that well.”

The Rock Island District’s Mississippi River Project Structures Maintenance crew, consisting of 15-20 employees, provided support to the St. Paul District by operating the Quad Cities heavy-lift crane throughout the replacement project. The lock was closed in 12-hour shifts to accommodate for commercial navigation needs during the process.

“The Quad Cities is a regional asset for the






Mississippi Valley Division,” said Thurman. “Rock Island District has a reputation for having expertise with heavy-lift cranes and lock and dam repair.”

When asked about how often the Quad Cities will be needed in other districts, Thurman says that’s the ‘million-dollar question.’

“Usage is dependent on the needs in the District, and it will be ready to assist where there is the highest need,” said Thurman.

All Mississippi River locks in the Rock Island District have already received their replacement gates and are now operating with gates that are less than 10 years old. St. Paul District just recently began this process, with Lock and Dam 2 being the first to receive new gates. Over the next 10 years it is anticipated that many more miter gates will need replacing throughout the region and the Quad Cities heavy-lift crane will be ready to assist. 



**Above: Cary Hahn, crane operator, watches his monitors as he carefully maneuvers the crane with Matt Thurman, Chief, Maintenance Section at Mississippi River Project Office. Below: Panoramic view of the worksite at Lock and Dam 2 in Hastings, Minnesota.**

*Photos by George Stringham*



*Scan code with cell phone camera to watch a time lapse video of the miter gates being replaced.*

**SCAN ME**





# NEW ARCHERY RANGE AT SAYLORVILLE LAKE HITS THE MARK

By Sam Heilig, Public Affairs Specialist

The Saylorville Lake Archery Range, originally scheduled to open during the 2020 recreation season but postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and contract challenges, officially opened for public use in July and is already a big hit with local archers.

The range is open sunrise to sunset during the recreation season, April 15 - November 1 and is free for public use. It can be reserved for youth

groups and special events by contacting the Saylorville

Lake Administration Office at 515-276-4656.


The facility, located in the Bob Shetler Recreation Area, just south of the administration building on the east side of the Saylorville Lake dam, offers a wide range of archery shooting options. A towering, six-station, elevated platform with three upper and three lower shooting areas overlooks stationary targets at 20, 30 and 40 yards. This provides users with a “tree stand” feel and accommodates both experienced archers perfecting their precision and new archers learning to shoot from an elevated level. The range also provides five large stationary targets from ground

level stations at 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 yards and a bring your own target lane where targets can be set at distances of 10-50 yards.

“The new addition has seen a constant flow of visitors on weekdays and weekends with many learning to shoot or just warming up for the upcoming Iowa hunting season,” said Justin Edwards, Natural Resource Specialist at Saylorville Lake.

The range is open to standard bow and crossbow users but only “field tip” arrows are permitted at the range, broadhead arrows are prohibited. Rules of the range and local hunting information are posted in a kiosk near the entrance of the range and can also be found on the Saylorville Lake website:

<https://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Saylorville-Lake/>.

The new archery range was made possible through a partnership with several local organizations and businesses including the Carpenters Union – Local 106, Scouts BSA – Troop 202, Manatts, Martin Marietta, Sportsman’s Warehouse, Bass Pro Shops, and the National Wild Turkey Federation – Central Iowa Longspurs. 

Scan code with cell phone camera to watch a video and learn more about the archery range.



SCAN ME

## Shawna Polen

### National USACE Water Safety Employee of the Year

Shawna Polen, Natural Resources Specialist, Coralville Lake, was selected as the 2021 USACE National Water Safety Employee Award recipient. In 2020, Polen shifted outreach efforts to virtual and social media platforms, developed key partnerships with local entities, coordinated placement of a water safety billboard along a major highway, and redesigned the Coralville Lake Visitor Center to better incorporate water safety. Her innovation, dedication, and personal drive to share the message of water safety and deliver the program reflect great credit upon herself and USACE.





# EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

By Kelcy Hanson, Editor

## DOUG MORGAN SUPERVISORY FACILITY OPERATIONS SPECIALIST

**D**oug Morgan has been working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rock Island District, on the Illinois Waterway since 1997 and was recently promoted to supervisory facility operations specialist in spring 2021. His interest in the Corps began when he was in the Air National Guard and at that time, opportunities were difficult to come by. He wanted to continue his federal service and the Rock Island District gave him that chance.

Over the past 24 years, employment at the Peoria, LaGrange and Starved Rock locks and dams have provided Morgan with a well-rounded perspective of operations on the Illinois Waterway. His career began as a lock and dam repairer and moved on to include positions such as diver, work lead, equipment mechanic, lock and dam repairer supervisor, assistant lockmaster, and lockmaster.

Morgan says he's received a lot of support from his chain of command and his counterparts over at the Mississippi River Project Office since starting his new position. Although he's been at it for a while now, he says he's still getting his feet wet and learning the ropes.

"I've been getting out and meeting the lock staff each week and getting to know the great folks we have working where the rubber meets the road within our District," said Morgan.


His primary role is to support the locks and dams by ensuring their immediate needs are met. This includes everything from purchasing supplies and handling personnel actions to taking care of travel, training and communications with stakeholders about the everchanging river. He's also been assisting District engineering techs on projects which are critical to the efficiency of the lock sites he oversees.

"I enjoy the satisfaction of helping people and solving problems," said Morgan.

One of the most memorable things he recalls from his time working for the District was a deployment to Waveland, Mississippi, post Hurricane Katrina.

"I watched a family with their two young children pick through rubble that used to be their home," said Morgan. "They were looking for any evidence of their past life to take with them as a memento before the heavy equipment idling nearby cleared the property. It was touching to witness."

When asked what he enjoys the most about working for the Rock Island District he said, "there's a lot of opportunity for those who enjoy pursuing new challenges."

Morgan currently resides in Metamora, Illinois, with his wife of 29 years. They have two daughters, two sons, one grandson and a granddaughter on the way in December. He enjoys spending as much time as possible with his grandson and camping with his wife in their travel trailer. 



***Congratulations Rock Island District on being voted a 'World Class Workplace,' according to the 2020 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. It took years of great leadership and team building to gain this region-wide recognition!***

# AROUND THE DISTRICT

## RETIREMENTS

**Barb Lester**, Chief, Construction Branch, retired June 30, after dedicating over 38 years of service to the federal government.

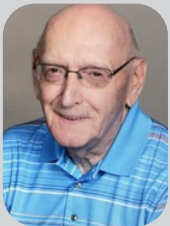
**Donald Bawmann**, Senior Geotechnical Engineering Specialist, retired July 1, after dedicating over 60 years of service to the federal government.

**Sue Hass**, Regulatory Division Secretary, retired July 31, after dedicating over 31 years of service to the federal government.

**Sherri Lewis**, Program Analyst, retired July 31, after dedicating over 36 years of service to the federal government.

**William Brown**, Lock Operator at Lock and Dam 17, retired August 30, after dedicating over 20 years of service to the federal government.

## SYMPATHY



**William 'Bill' Vaugh, Sr.**, 83, of Bellevue, Iowa, passed away April 29. Vaugh worked 28 years as a Lock Operator at Lock and Dam 11 and Lock and Dam 12.



**Lorin Joseph Hager**, 88, of Bellevue, Iowa, passed away June 20. Hager retired in 1998, after working 18 years as a Lock Operator at Lock and Dam 12.

## CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations to Nick and Megan Moore on the birth of their son, Thomas Dale Moore, on Feb. 1. Thomas weighed in at 9 pounds, 4 ounces and 22 inches long. He's already loved by his five big sisters and big brother.



Congratulations to Brunson and Madeline Grothus on the birth of their son, Cash Peter Grothus, on July 14. Cash weighed in at 8 pounds 7.5 ounces and 19 inches long. He's already loved by his older brothers, Graham and Beau.



Congratulations to Justine and Kenny Womboldt on the birth of their son, Jack James Womboldt, on Feb. 26. Jack weighed in at 7 pounds, 15 ounces and 21 inches long. He's already loved by his two big sisters.



Congratulations to Josh and Megan Cackley on the birth of their daughter, Scarlet Paige Cackley, on July 19. Scarlet weighed in at 8 pounds, 2 ounces and 20 inches long.



# EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

APRIL  
*Sara Munts*



Sara is recognized for her hard work, research and coordination to deliver a successful LDP II Program that was almost 100% virtual due to COVID.

JUNE  
*Sarah Drey*



Sarah assisted an employee with an insurance benefit issue and she utilized her knowledge and contacts to facilitate a successful resolution.

MAY  
*Julie McDonald*



While assisting a family in purchasing a pass, Julie provided exceptional customer service, resulting in a complimentary thank you letter being sent to MVD.

JULY  
*Brian Lane*



Brian is recognized for his exemplary work moving, staging and procuring new furniture for building 340 during the height of COVID teleworking.



Congratulations to Chris and Nicole Paul on the birth of their son, Noah Paul, on August 22. Noah weighed in at 8 pounds, 11 ounces and is doing well adjusting to home.

*Please send family news to  
[Kelcy.C.Hanson@usace.army.mil](mailto:Kelcy.C.Hanson@usace.army.mil) to be  
included in the next issue of the  
Tower Times.*



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
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## ANNUAL RETIREES LUNCHEON 2021

