



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers LA District commander, right, and Stacy Gorin, executive director of the Southern California Mountains Foundation, left, celebrate after signing a commemorative document acknowledging a Cooperative Partnership Agreement — the first one of its kind in this region — between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and the Southern California Mountains Foundation Oct. 17 in Hesperia, California.

Corps commemorates partnership with Southern California Mountains Foundation

BY DENA O'DELL
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

HESPERIA, Calif. — Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District and the Southern California Mountains Foundation celebrated a new partnership agreement during a signing ceremony Oct. 17 at the John Swisher Community Center in Hesperia.

"I am pleased to be here today to acknowledge and commemorate this Cooperative Partnership Agreement — the first one of its kind in this region — between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Southern California Mountains Foundation," said Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Corps' LA District.

The agreement represents an opportunity to provide training, educational opportunities and environmental stewardship services at Mojave River Dam and Reservoir for participants in the Urban Conservation Corps — a youth service

agency, established by the Southern California Mountains Foundation, that provides job training and skill development for young adults in local communities.

The agreement allows participants to gain experience with project planning, development and implementation on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project lands.

Built in 1971 by the Corps as a flood-risk reduction system, Mojave River Dam protects the lives and property of millions of people in the area.

The dam and reservoir have become staples in the community, Baker said.

Families visit the area to recreate and enjoy the historic Pacific Crest Trail, a National Scenic Trail that runs from Mexico to Canada, which passes alongside the dam. The area also

Los Angeles District celebrates end of fiscal year with more than \$600M in contract awards

BY BROOKS O. HUBBARD IV
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LOS ANGELES — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District awarded about 755 contracts worth more than \$600 million in fiscal year 2023.

Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, and Justin Gay, LA District deputy engineer, lead the End-of-Year Celebration — that highlighted the year's accomplishments — Oct. 17 at the LA District Headquarters in downtown Los Angeles.

Baker acknowledged the hard work of employees leading up to the Sept. 30 deadline.

"I am honored to be here today at my first SPL town hall to celebrate all of yours and the district's accomplishments," Baker said. "SPL has a phenomenal reputation throughout the entire Corps of Engineers, not only because of the size, scope and significance of the program that we deliver for the nation, but also because of the amazing people that have come through and continue to serve here."

During FY23, the district completed more than \$780 million in work, including about \$385 million in Military Construction in support of our warfighters and their families; about \$288 million in Civil Works projects in local communities; and \$113 million in International and Interagency Support Services in support of veterans and other agencies.

Baker further highlighted a few of the district's special accomplishments:

- The Government Purchase Card was a successful program with 845 actions, valued at more than \$880 million.
- The LA District's Recruiting Facilities Program team accomplished a higher percentage of programmed actions than any other district, accomplishing 247 ac-

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Recognizing a safety MVP



Courtesy photo

Chris Rainwater, deputy chief of Safety for the Los Angeles District, right, presents a safety coin to Arnold Gelacio, deputy resident engineer, on his departure from the Veterans Affairs Long Beach Mega Project site. Rainwater noted the significant contributions to safety Gelacio made during his tenure on the projects. Join us as we congratulate Gelacio on his noteworthy accomplishments and wish him well as he departs for a one-year assignment.



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Shining a light on the importance of safety at all levels

Hello, SPL Team!

To gauge just how the employees in the SPL feel about safety in their working environments, the Los Angeles District contracted with the National Safety Council, an independent, nongovernmental agency, to conduct an all-employee safety perception. The NSC was administered in August and September of this year.

As this month's *NewsCastle* is being published, the NSC is preparing their out brief, but a few key items have already come out of the survey. First, our score is much higher than the previous survey, conducted in 2020, and that's great news! Among our district's strengths were employee perceptions regarding our organizational teamwork, the role that supervisors play in ensuring a safe work environment, the district's emphasis on



COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

safety over schedule, and the model of safety that leadership demonstrates.

As with any survey and any topic, there are also some areas where we can and will improve. We need to work on our level of understanding of safety regulations as well as our role in protecting colleagues. Additionally, we reported that

we need more training on hazard identification and mitigation/abatement. These responses will really help us to continue the process of improving our safety culture, and I am very thankful for the honest feedback.

A strong safety culture embodies the Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System principles by ensuring our entire team embraces and understands the program, and that we self-correct by seeking feedback and active participation at all

levels. There is no monopoly on great ideas, and everyone has something to offer regardless of paygrade, length of service, or job category — we are all safety officers, and we must look out for each other! Supervisors especially should foster an open, fear-free environment for reporting safety concerns. Remember, on or off the worksite, our approach to safety is positive and collaborative! No project is worth a serious injury.

As Gen. Scott Spellmon has said, "Safety is the imperative in everything we do!" Simply put, nothing comes before safety — our personnel are our highest concern each and every day. Let's continue working together to safely deliver quality projects on time and within budget!

Proud to be SPL!

Col. Andrew Baker

Around the District

"What I like about working with the Corps is working with and meeting so many people from various military and civilian backgrounds."

Paul is tasked with supporting several projects on Luke Air Force Base in Arizona. He specializes in project and construction set-ups, timekeeping and training coordination. Paul has been with the Corps for a total of 10 years. He is from Lodi, California.



Paul Sanchez
Field Office Assistant



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is one of the few places in the nation that visitors can view Joshua Trees, desert flora and fauna and wildlife that can be found in the area, including endangered species, like the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the Arroyo Toad.

In recent years, the dam and reservoir have been the subject of vandalism; illegal activities, including off-road vehicle driving; and, in some cases, fatalities.

During the five-year term of the agreement between the two agencies, services will be requested by a task order as funds, work and educational project opportunities become available.

Proposed future projects include restoration, such as the installation of barriers to protect critical habitat; GPS monitoring; and public outreach and interpretation.

Each specific project proposed under the agreement will be evaluated by both the Corps and the foundation to make certain it meets the goals of education and stewardship.

Stacy Gorin, executive director of the Southern California Mountains Foundation, said she is looking forward to introducing the next generation of conservation leaders to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“I think traditionally, our groups in San Bernardino and Coachella Valley have not always been introduced to what the Army Corps does and also what job opportunities there are, and how it is part of the climate impact and climate resiliency work that needs to happen within our communities, and the importance of connecting these communities to these resources,” she said.

Victor Gonzales, a 21-year-old from San Bernardino and a member of the Urban Conservation Corps, said he has been interested in working with nature since high school.

During the two-and-a-half months he has been with the conservation group, Gonzales has learned how to use a chainsaw, render first aid, perform CPR and learn how to use a tourniquet, he said, which he was able to put into practice when a food service worker got a gash while working.

“The UCC helped me discover skills I never thought I could learn,” he said.

Gonzales said he believes the partnership between the two agencies will teach himself and others more about conservation.

I think we’re going to learn some new skills about conservation — building a fence, cutting trees and to learn why we’re doing this,” he said. “This is something I see myself doing

until retirement, and, if I do have kids in the future, I hope to teach them about conservation and have them out in nature, instead of being inside all day.”

Following the signing ceremony, participants were invited to tour the Mojave River Dam.

Among the participants were Henry Csaposs, LA District park ranger, who is now on a detail with the Department of Defense’s Climate Action Team, and Connie Chan Le, former LA District park ranger, who now works as an environmental planner in the Civil and Public Works Branch with the Corps’ Honolulu District. Both were instrumental in getting the Cooperative Partnership Agreement off the ground — working on the agreement for the last three years.

“This was really important to come out because Henry and I had been working on this for a few years now,” Chan Le said. “We really are grateful for the opportunity to work with a great partner like the Southern California Mountains Foundation — that is an expert in trail maintenance and restoration, as well as communication with the local community here in this area, so we definitely wouldn’t want to miss it for the world.”

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Photo by Dena O'Dell

Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers LA District, U.S. Representative Jay Obernolte’s office; San Bernardino National Forest; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department; Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, under the umbrella of the Southern California Mountains Foundation; and Hesperia Recreation and Park District pose for a picture after signing a commemorative document acknowledging a Cooperative Partnership Agreement between the LA District and the Southern California Mountains Foundation Oct. 17 in Hesperia, California.

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“It’s been a journey, and it’s really rewarding to be here today and see all of these folks from the different agencies come together and have the commander here,” Csaposs added. “It means a lot. Connie and I are moving onto new jobs, so it’s really rewarding to see this capstone to mark the progress.”

Other participants included representatives from the Corps’ LA District; U.S. Representative Jay Obernolte’s office; San Bernardino National Forest; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department; Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire; Southern California Mountains Foundation; and Hesperia Recreation and Park District.

“Working with our partners, our goal is to ensure public safety at our dams, to protect critical infrastructure and habitat for threatened and endangered species in the area and ensure this area can continue to be enjoyed by future generations,” Baker said. “I am excited to commemorate this new, historic partnership between the Corps and the Southern California Mountains Foundation and look forward to working with all of you!”



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Victor Gonzales, 21, San Bernardino, foreground, and Joe Taylor, 19, San Bernardino, both with the Urban Conservation Corps of the Inland Empire, under the umbrella of the Southern California Mountains Foundation point out a feature at the Mojave River Dam Oct. 17 in Hesperia, California.



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Henry Csaposs, LA District park ranger, right, and Connie Chan Le, former LA District park ranger, left, pose for a picture in front of Mojave River Dam Oct. 17 in Hesperia, California. Both Csaposs and Chan-Le were present for a signing ceremony acknowledging the Cooperative Partnership Agreement between the LA District and the Southern California Mountains Foundation. The duo worked for two years with other agencies on the agreement and were instrumental in getting the agreement to fruition.



Photos by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, and Justin Gay, LA District deputy engineer, both at right, lead the End-of-Year Celebration Oct. 17 at the LA District Headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The district completed more than \$780 million in work; completed 755 contract actions, worth more than \$600 million; and closed out 231 contracts in fiscal year 2023.

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tions, valued at more than \$32 million.

- The Installation Support Team completed the land acquisitions for the Fort Irwin Expansion project, a series of military construction projects that began in 2004. The project acquired 551 parcels of land comprising nearly 115,000 acres of land.

- About \$60 million in FY23 sustainment, restoration and modernization obligations were completed, which is the largest ever in Arizona and Nevada.

- Polacca Wash Emergency Management mission protecting Hopi people and property was completed in August – well ahead of schedule – with no mission impact to End-of-Year contract awards.

“Since taking command in July, it’s been a busy few months,” Baker said. “We went from going through our first tropical cyclone to hit this region in 84 years, to hosting an array of distinguished guests. What we do directly impacts our national economy, the safety and welfare of our citizens, and our national defense.”

Baker went on to acknowledge other accomplishments in FY23, including:

- Response to Tropical Storm Hilary, in which the district successfully kept communities surrounding our dams safe and captured 19,000 acre-feet of storm water.

- The Energy Resilience Project completion at the Joint Forces Training Base at Los Alamitos.

- A Project Partnership Agreement signing for the San Diego County (Encinitas and Solana Beach) Shoreline Protection Project.

- A Project Partnership Agreement signing for a 50-year shoreline protection agreement

with City of San Clemente.

- The signing of the Eastern Municipal Water District Project Partnership Agreement.

- The signing of the Little Colorado River at Winslow Flood-Risk Management Project Design Agreement.

- Completion of emergency flood-risk mitigation measures at the Bishop Paiute Tribe Indian Reservation in Bishop, California.

- Imperial Streams Salton Sea and Tributaries Feasibility Study cost-share agreement signing.

- Groundbreaking at Fort Irwin Simulation Center at Fort Irwin, California.

- Alcoa Dike wall installation in Corona, California.

- Completion of an air traffic control tower at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, California.

- Public Law 84-99, Emergency Response to Natural Disasters, response to flood-fighting at Duncan, Arizona.

- Completion of a project that restores the capability of five federally constructed channels in Maricopa County.

In addition to celebrating numerous project completions throughout the district, more than 75 employees were recognized as Year-End Heroes for their contributions to the organization, and more than 40 employees were presented with second, third and fourth quarter awards during the ceremony.



Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander, left, and Justin Gay, LA District deputy engineer, right, lead the End-of-Year Celebration Oct. 17 at the LA District Headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The district completed more than \$780 million in work; completed 755 contract actions, worth more than \$600 million; and closed out 231 contracts in fiscal year 2023.

Corps general tours, receives updates on VA Long Beach mega project

STORY AND PHOTOS JOHN REESE
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations — and a former LA District commander — was one of several distinguished visitors who received an update on Corps’ projects at the VA Long Beach Health Care System.

Colloton was joined by Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander; Tambour Eller, Senior Executive Service chief for Interagency and International Services Division; David Hibner, SES, director, U.S. Army Geospatial Center; Col. Chad Caldwell, acting commander for the Corps’ South Pacific Division; and other senior Corps and Veterans Affairs’ leaders to review progress of the new 181,000-square-foot Community Living Center and two separate 80,000-plus-square-foot mental health in-patient and out-patient facilities. The VA Long Beach Health Care System serves more than 50,000 veterans.

“Since the last time I was out here, so much has been done,” Colloton said. “It’s great to see it so far along and so close to the end. We are getting there. They’re in the final stages of closing things up and making the final finishes to be suitable to move patients and providers in, so it’s exciting to see.”

Colloton, who was at the project site for the groundbreaking ceremony on Veterans Day 2018, said it’s taken a while to reach completion, but once it’s done, it will serve veterans in the area for years to come.



Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations and former LA District commander, center, is briefed on one of the mental health care buildings nearing completion at the Veterans Affairs Long Beach Healthcare System Oct. 12 in Long Beach, Calif. The \$350-million projects are expected to be completed in fiscal year 2024.

Focusing on taking care of the nation’s veterans by constructing these facilities at the VA is a top priority, and SES Eller said the construction progress has been phenomenal.

“What we’re observing is the partnership continuing to mature – the lessons learned and best practices,” Eller said, noting there are three other VA Community Living Centers and parking structures under construction, using the latest technologies. “At the end of the day, we’re supporting winning by implementing those best practices and delivering for our veterans.”

Baker also noted the amount of progress since his first visit in April 2023, before assum-

ing command of the LA District in July.

“There’s really been a lot of progress,” Baker said. “It’s starting to look like a finished facility. I’m looking forward to getting this great facility into operation, which is a huge improvement to what the veterans on site have now. It’s going to be fabulous.”

The single building that currently houses the VA Long Beach mental health services and the Community Living Center Healthcare System patients is scheduled for demolition after the replacement facilities are fully operational. The \$350-million projects are expected to be completed in fiscal year 2024.



Senior leaders with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Veterans Affairs and contractors pose for a photo at the Veterans Affairs Long Beach Healthcare System project site Oct. 12 in Long Beach, Calif. The VA Long Beach Healthcare System serves more than 50,000 veterans.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, the Corps' deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations, left of center, signs a partnership agreement Oct. 12 in Pasadena, California, with Juan Rivera, chairman of the board for Great Minds in STEM, right of center, while joined by other senior leaders from both the Corps and GMIS.

Corps signs partnership agreement with Great Minds in STEM

BY BROOKS O. HUBBARD IV
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PASADENA, Calif. — Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Great Minds in STEM recently signed a partnership agreement to assist underserved students in STEM pathways.

A memorandum of understanding was signed Oct. 12 during the 35th GMIS conference's National STEM Heroes Awards dinner at the Pasadena Convention Center.

The agreement provides a cooperative framework for the Corps and GMIS to increase participation of underserved students in STEM career fields.

The agreement was signed by Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, the Corps' deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations, on behalf of Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon, commanding general of the Corps, and

Juan Rivera, chairman of the board for GMIS. Other senior leaders from both the Corps and GMIS also participated in the event.

"First, this isn't the first MOU between Great Minds in STEM and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers," said retired Maj. Gen. Mark Toy, a current GMIS board member and former LA District commander. "Our organizations have a history of formal agreements that have empowered us to make real change on the ground in underserved communities all over the country."

According to Toy, both GMIS and the Corps have a vision to attain diversification in STEM leadership that better reflects national demographics.

"We will employ a variety of strategies to achieve this, including increasing the enrollment of the underserved Americans in STEM majors at U.S. colleges and enhancing the

visibility of USACE as a viable potential employer for all students in STEM careers," Toy said.

The goal is to identify and implement initiatives to increase workforce opportunities for underserved STEM students and Corps' professionals.

"We renewed our commitment to identify initiatives that may increase workforce opportunities for underserved STEM students and professionals at USACE. As we in the Army, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers want to provide opportunities where STEM students and professionals can realize their best self," said Colloton. "Be All You Can Be!"

Upon completion of the signing, each of the Corps' participants was presented with a commemorative 35th anniversary of the organization's "challenge coin." The challenge coin was created in memory of the late founder of GMIS, Ray Bagano.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Members of the Los Angeles District accompany Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations, during her Oct. 11 visit to the Department of Veterans Affairs San Diego medical complex.

Corps senior leader visits VA San Diego projects

BY BROOKS O. HUBBARD IV
LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Deputy Commanding General for Military and International Operations Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton visited the Department of Veterans Affairs San Diego under-construction Spinal Cord Injury and Community Living Center Oct. 11 to meet with representatives working on Veterans Affairs projects. The projects are managed by the Corps' Los Angeles District.

Colloton met with leaders and project managers working on the new Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center building and adjacent newly constructed parking structure at the San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center in La Jolla, California.

She was joined by other leaders, including Tambour Eller, SES, chief, Interagency and International Services Division; Col. Chad Caldwell, commander of the South Pacific Division; Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Los Angeles District; and Jenna Williams, chief of the western Region Construction and Facilities Management, Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Spinal Cord Injury and Community Living Center facility is projected to open in fall 2024 and will provide care to veterans and active-duty personnel with spinal cord injuries and disorders who live in the San Diego and Imperial counties in California, and in Arizona and southern Nevada.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Members of the Los Angeles District brief Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations, during her Oct. 11 visit to the Department of Veterans Affairs San Diego medical complex.



Photo by John Reese

The Pasadena Convention Center serves as this year's Great Minds in STEM Career Fair, which welcomed hundreds of college students Oct. 13-14 to explore career opportunities with major military and civilian agencies.

Corps recruiters interview future employees at GMiS

BY JOHN REESE
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PASADENA, Calif. — Hundreds of college students gathered Oct. 13-14 at the Pasadena Convention Center for the 2023 Great Minds in STEM Career Fair to explore career opportunities with major military and civilian agencies.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District participated, along with four other Army civilian recruiting teams to interview potential candidates for science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related jobs.

The Corps' interviewers were a mixture of LA District subject-matter experts and recruiters from the Corps' Talent Acquisition Center of Excellence. The district's outreach was in support of the USACE Mission Critical Occupation and diversity requirement objectives.

GMiS is very well organized, according to USACE South Pacific Division recruiter Susan Smith.

"They have great candidates that come to us,"

Smith said. "We have to look through a lot of different types of individuals because they're all at different levels in their experience, whether they're just starting school or getting close to graduation. For us, we're trying to really educate them on what the Corps does and get them interested in the work we do."

Two GMiS interview sessions took place. The Oct. 13 "speed interviewing" round in the center's massive ballroom was for groups of future graduates to ask general questions in 15-minute meet-and-greets, with interviewees moving to different tables featuring different agencies and companies. The Oct. 14 individual interviews gave participants the chance to being hired on the spot.

Cal State Los Angeles engineering and technology major Vanessa Sanchez was one of the many interviewees interested in opportunities with the Corps.

"I'm interested in looking for internships and what (the Corps) has to offer in the pro-

gram," she said, adding she was looking to initially remain in Southern California.

Civil engineering major Marlen Tirgues, also a Cal State LA student, stressed her intent to do good works in structural construction.

"Honestly, one of my biggest career goals is basically to help and to give back, to use my bachelor's degree to help anyone I can," she said. "I think that the Army Corps is the perfect place to start."

Before her GMiS interviews, Tirgues said she was advised not to have expectations about what a career with the Corps might be like.

"I'm 20 years old, and I'm still young. Any opportunity that I love that would open up I'd absolutely take," Tirgues said. "I'm open to use my degree for anything that's going to benefit society."

Recruiter and LA District's Lake Isabella deputy resident engineer Erin Gore was looking for

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specific degrees as she interviewed candidates.

"I was looking for chemists, archeologists, geophysicists or surveyors," Gore said, adding she was still looking for an archeologist. "I haven't found anyone yet."

Many candidates were pursuing degrees in computer science, said Los Angeles District chief of Navigation and Coastal Projects Steve Dwyer.

"We heard from a lot of computer science people, but we also saw some civil and structural engineers that would be ideal candidates for us," Dwyer said.

Fellow recruiter Chris Velasquez, U.S. Army Civilian Careers, encountered many computer science students, too.

"I talked to some structural and mechanical engineers and a great majority of computer science (majors), and found some potential candidates to hire right now," Velasquez said.

Great Minds in STEM, the hosts for the annual GMiS career fair, creates professional connections between students, educators and STEM professionals. It's of interest to the Corps, the Army and the Department of Defense. The fair provides outreach for the recruitment of engineers, scientists, mathematicians and information technologists.



Photo by John Reese

Cal State University Fullerton student Oscar Sosa Cordova, left, scans a QR code to begin his GMiS interview with Steve Dwyer, LA District Navigation Branch chief, Oct. 14 at the Pasadena Convention Center.



Photo by John Reese

South Pacific Division recruiter Susan Smith, right, welcomes the first students to arrive at one of two tables for the Army Corps of Engineers Oct. 13 in the ballroom of the Pasadena Convention Center. Across from Smith is fellow recruiter and LA District's Lake Isabella deputy resident engineer Erin Gore.



Photos by John Reese

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District leaders stand together for a photo with partners from the Ventura County Watershed during an Oct. 19 visit to county offices in Ventura and within the banks of Santa Paula Creek and the Santa Clara River watershed.

LA District leaders meet with Ventura County Watershed officials

Los Angeles District commander Col. Andrew Baker and senior members of the LA team met with officials of Ventura County Watershed Oct. 19 for an update on past, current and future projects, at county offices in Ventura and within the banks of Santa Paula Creek and the Santa Clara River watershed.

The creek and river had been heavily overgrown with vegetation until the massive rains and melting snowpack of the past winter scoured it clean, including fish ladders that permit species to return to their spawning pools.

A helicopter tour followed from a landing zone in Santa Paula that provided Baker and deputy district engineer Justin Gay an aerial view of Sespe Creek watershed, the Matilija Dam ecosystem restoration project and levee projects on the Ventura and Santa Clara rivers.

The Corps has a long and successful partnership with Ventura County for safe flood management; part of the discussion included annual funding for the levee improvements feasibility studies.



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District leaders join partners from the Ventura County Watershed during an Oct. 19 visit along the banks of Santa Paula Creek.

LA District volunteers join Día de los Muertos festivities

LA District volunteers participated at El Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, at the Los Angeles River Center, Oct. 24, in downtown Los Angeles. District environmental manager Eileen Takata and planner Grant Adams represented the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the lively event that featured a parade, bands, foods and dance performances. The outreach brought awareness of the Corps' mission and the dams that protect the 2nd largest city in the U.S. The event, often held in the evening, allows District volunteers to participate in it.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District environmental manager Eileen Takata and planner Grant Adams represented the Corps at the lively Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, event at the Los Angeles River Center in downtown Los Angeles.



Photos by John Reese



Community members and participants of the Oct. 24 Día de los Muertos event walk in the procession.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District join partners with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to tour an access point for subsurface water near the Painted Rock Dam Oct. 17 near Gila Bend, Arizona. The dual agencies conducted a site visit and a public meeting for the Painted Rock Marsh Restoration project Oct. 17-18 near Gila Bend, Arizona.

Agencies team up for public meeting on marsh restoration

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

GILA BEND, Ariz. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hosted a public meeting for the Painted Rock Marsh Restoration project Oct. 18 at the Gila Bend Library in Gila Bend, Arizona.

Attendees reviewed the proposal to return a small portion of land in the dry Gila River Drainage Basin, near the Corps operated Painted Rock Dam, into a wetland and wildlife habitat.

“Our project will provide water for wildlife in an area that currently doesn’t have any and provide habitat for the birds who use the Gila River as a migratory corridor,” said Pam Kostka, Los Angeles District’s operations program manager overseeing the project. “If approved, the project will return a small portion, about a quarter of an acre to an approximation of what it was pre-development.”

The Corps’ Sustainable River Program provides funding to dams to increase the sustainability of their operations. Under the program, the Corps is proposing to install a perennial

wetland feature, or marsh, upstream of the dam to provide a water source for wildlife including pronghorn, bighorn sheep, deer and birds.

“We anticipate this project, as a new water source for wildlife, will draw species down toward the Gila River that haven’t utilized the area since the flow disappeared,” said Kostka, an operations expert of more than 10 years. “It is also a wonderful opportunity for the Painted Rock project to develop relationships with recreation groups, particularly hunters.”

The cohost of the public meeting, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist Kirk Young, is a subject-matter expert on Arizona environmental history and animal habitats in the state.

“This project is intended to bring back a piece of what was here,” Young said immediately after the public meeting.

According to Young, the project would restore an important portion of vast wetland teaming with wildlife that was located along the Gila River Drainage Basin until the late 1800s.

“This is a very important spot for the native Americans who used this area. You can see

the evidence of what this place used to be on the rock art near Painted Rock,” Young said, describing the rocks along the basin featuring centuries-old pictographs credited to the Native Americans that inhabited the area. “The Spanish explorers also stopped here centuries ago because of all the wetland and wildlife habitat that used to be here. This project is intended to just bring a little piece back for wildlife.”

“Working with Kirk has been a great joy,” Kostka said after the public meeting. “Kirk has immense passion, a great knowledge base, and tons of ideas. I’d say he is probably the biggest driver of this project.”

Other agency partners include the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

“I’m thrilled at the opportunity to provide a version of the habitat that used to dominate the Gila River, as well as provide water for wildlife,” Kostka said.

The next step for the program manager is to develop a working partnership with Maricopa County and the Bureau of Land Management.

Girl Scouts STEM Expo



Photo by Andy Rios

John Quackenbush, chief of the Soils Design and Materials Section with the Los Angeles District, left, helps guide a Girl Scout during a hands-on activity at the seventh annual Girl Scouts of Orange County STEM expo Oct. 21 at the Orange County Coast Planetarium in Costa Mesa, California. More than 300 fourth- to eighth-grade Girl Scouts participated in the expo, which is designed to introduce the students to concepts and potential careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. Also representing the LA District at this year’s event was, at right, Maj. Stephen Brooks, deputy commander, and Lillian Schaffer, geologist, second from right.



Steve Dwyer, chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District’s Navigation Branch, gives a presentation to University of Southern California architecture students Oct. 20 at the school’s Harris Hall in Los Angeles.

Dwyer was invited by USC School of Architecture Professor Doug Noble, who, once a year, invites professionals from the industry in architecture and related fields to speak about their companies and what they do.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Victor Garcia Jr., a research civil engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Engineer Research and Development Center, headquartered in Vicksburg, Mississippi, receives STEM Hero award at the 2023 Great Minds in STEM awards dinner Oct. 12 in Pasadena, California.

Corps engineers honored at GMiS conference

BY BROOKS O. HUBBARD IV
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PASADENA, Calif. — The Great Minds in STEM organization recognized two U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees Oct. 12 during the 35th annual conference Oct. 11-14 in Pasadena.

Victor Garcia Jr. and Ernesto Cruz, who are both research civil engineers with the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center, headquartered in Vicksburg, Mississippi, received STEM Hero awards at the dinner.

Garcia was presented the award by retired Maj. Gen. Mark Toy, former U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander and now the general manager of the Yorba Linda Water District, and Maj. Gen. Kimberly Colloton, the Corps' deputy commanding general for Military and International Operations, on behalf of Lt. Gen. Scott Spellmon, commanding general of the Corps.

"Since joining the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center in June 2021, Dr. Victor Garcia has become a vital member of a group devoted to researching airfields and pavements," Colloton said. "As a research civil engineer with the structure's laboratory at ERDC, Dr. Garcia focuses on developing innovative techniques to test reclamation pavements used in expeditionary construction. His group's work has vital implications on the

military's ability to transport personnel and materiel into newly constructed or upgraded airfields, especially those that support missions in conflict and disaster zones."

Colloton later received Cruz's award, who was not in attendance.

Cruz was honored for his technical accomplishments, leadership and teamwork skills, along with his willingness to mentor others.

In his current role at ERDC, Ernesto researches weapons effects, projectile penetration, forensics, explosion effects and weapons-related code development.

Colloton said his work includes conducting field and laboratory research associated with damage assessment, and he develops improved collection methods of forensic data to aid in protecting the warfighter and U.S. assets.

"His most recent achievement involved the development of fast-running engineering codes designed to quickly estimate damage due to detonations," she said. "The results of this development will improve tools and computational capabilities that predict the terminal performance and lethality of new weapons against structures and other critical targets."

According to Cruz's nominator submission: "Cruz began his career in the ERDC as a student intern while completing his Master of Science degree from the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez. Upon graduation, he became a full-

time member of the ERDC team. Since then, his professional growth has been outstanding. As a weapons effects research engineer, he has used his technical skills and creativity to solve problems about the effects of explosive and penetrating weapons on structures. This work is critical to making the world safer and better. Early in his career, he focused on explosives forensics and developed tools to allow the characterization and data collection of post-blast attack scenes. This allows friendly personnel to spend less time in harm's way while collecting data from an attack scene, ultimately protecting lives."

STEM Hero honorees are selected from a pool of civilian and uniformed military personnel who excel in STEM fields at agencies, labs and branches that report to the Department of Defense.

Great Minds in STEM was established as HENAAC in 1989 to motivate underserved students to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.

The Corps' participation in the GMiS conference reinforced its investment in STEM programs and demonstrated its commitment to building a diverse and competent workforce for the future.

The GMiS conference concluded with a career fair in which the Corps' exhibit provided networking opportunities for promising university students interested in USACE careers.

LA District looks for future women engineers at 'WE23'

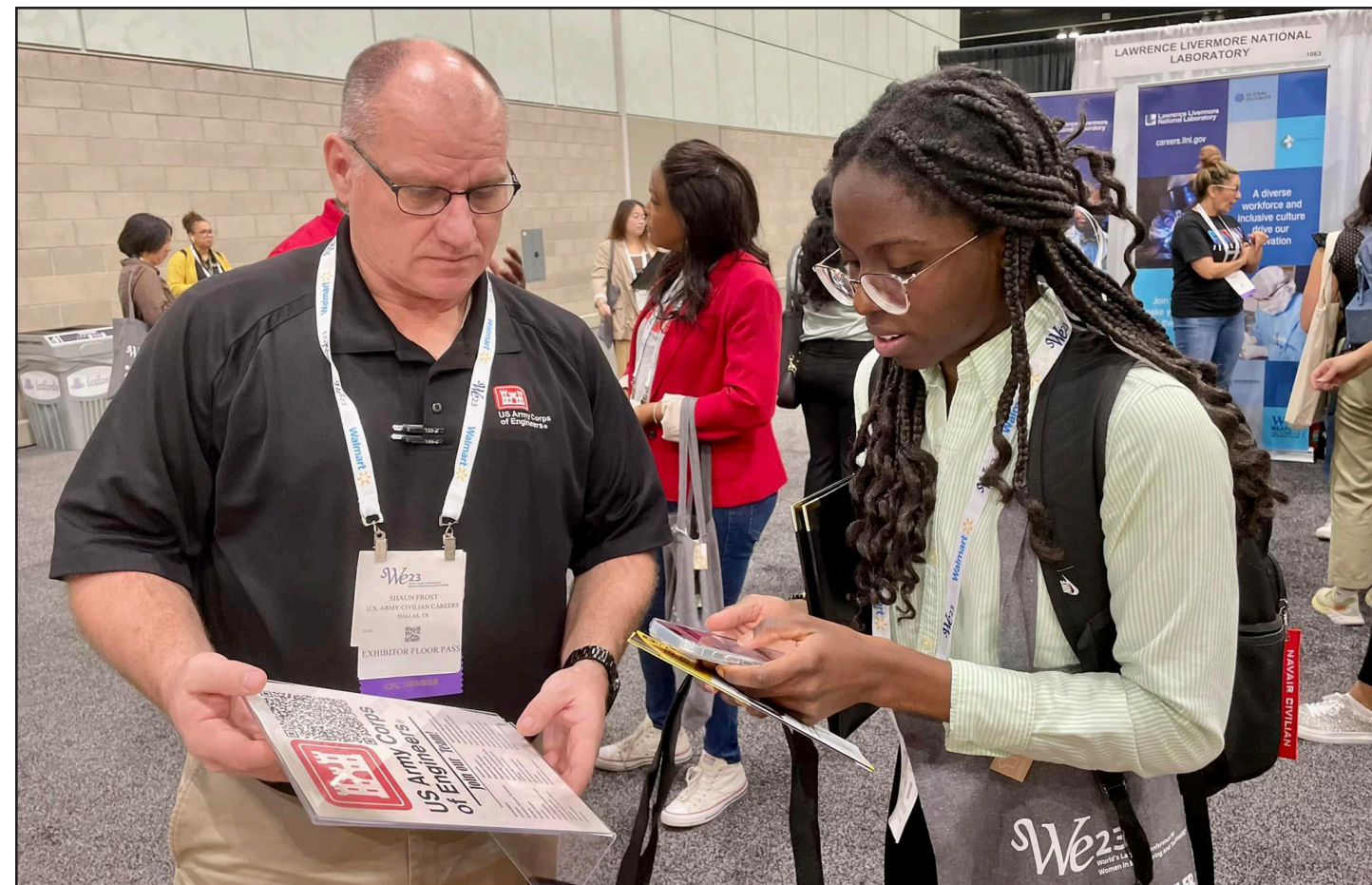


Photo by Stephen Baack

Shaun Frost, chief of the Los Angeles District's Construction Division, speaks to a job candidate Oct. 27 at the Society of Women Engineers Career Fair, a three-day flagship event held Oct. 26-28 in Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES — Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, including the Los Angeles District, met with prospective employees at the Society of Women Engineers Career Fair, a three-day flagship event, Oct. 26-28 in Los Angeles and hosted by the Society of Women Engineers, during the second day of the event.

The mission of the Society of Women Engineers is to "empower women to achieve their full potential in careers as engineers and leaders; expand the image of the engineering and technology professions as a positive force in improving the quality of life, and demonstrate the value of diversity and inclusion."

Throughout the career fair, Corps recruiters collected about 60 resumes, engaged with more than 220 candidates and made at least one tentative job offer.

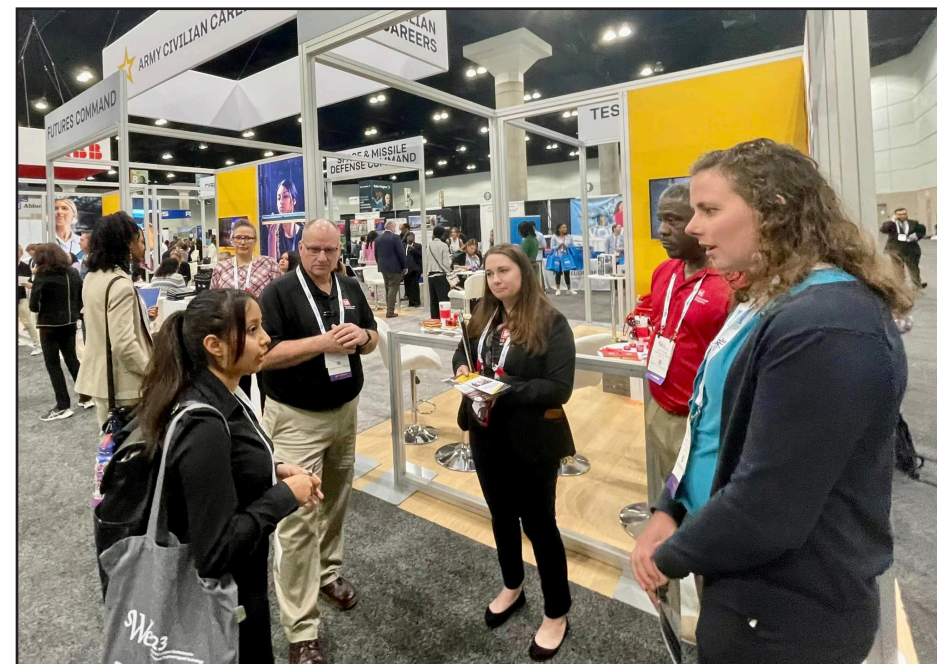


Photo by Stephen Baack

Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers speak to job candidate Micala Jones, left, Oct. 27 at the Society of Women Engineers Career Fair, a three-day flagship event held Oct. 26-28 in Los Angeles.

CULTURAL
AWARENESS

OBSERVANCE



OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH



Led by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) recognizes the contributions America's workers with disabilities make each day across our Nation.

In recognizing NDEAM, the Department of Defense's reaffirms its commitment to recruit, retain, and advance these individuals throughout the workforce.

This important national observance dates to the end of World War II. In 1945, with the return of thousands of injured Service members, the U.S. government pushed to educate the public about issues relating to disabilities and employment and made specific efforts to assist these individuals in a variety of ways.

Congress enacted Public Law 176, declaring the first week of October each year as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.

In 1962, the word 'physically' was removed to include contributions of people with other disabilities.

The federal legislature expanded the week-long observance to a month and changed the name to NDEAM in 1988.

In 2012, Alaska Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Maddamma, a pararescueman, sustained an injury that shattered the bones in his lower left leg. He spent years in the hospital, undergoing multiple surgeries, and physical therapy to regain the full use of his leg. Eventually, he chose to have his leg surgically amputated, enabling his return to military service.

When asked how NDEAM unites the community, he spoke about how people can be an "iceberg" and what a person knows about their own coworkers they see every day is just the tip of their life experience.

"These awareness months bring people together, opens doors, and draw attention to things," said Maddamma.

Each person brings distinctive skills and capabilities to their employment. Ensuring equity, dignity, respect, and cooperation among all individuals are essential values in the DoD work environment. The Defense Department recognizes past achievements as it strives to build an inclusive future workforce to achieve total force readiness.

