



Supporting tribal nation partners, communities



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Michael Connor, center left, joins Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, Los Angeles District deputy commander, center right, to discuss project details with Navajo Nation representatives Aug. 29 near Birdsprings, Arizona. Connor announced 12 projects, with a bridge project over the Little Colorado River in Birdsprings being the first one selected, to be part of a pilot program that partners the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with economically disadvantaged communities, tribal nations and other local nonfederal sponsors to develop water resource projects to support the safety and economic viability of underserved and overburdened communities across the U.S. Keep an eye out next month for the full story on this project!

USACE, 355th partners break ground on new security entrance at Davis-Monthan

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. — Senior leaders with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base broke ground on the new South Wilmot Gate project during an Aug. 23 ceremony at the air base near Tucson.

“The project is a complete reconstruction of our South Wilmot gate,” said Air Force Col. Scott Mills, 355th Wing commander at Davis-Monthan. “It’s not just for the military and ci-

vilians who work on base. We want to encourage folks from Tucson, and we want to give them easy and ample access.”

The \$15-million project will include a vehicle inspection facility and updated security measures, while easing traffic flow in and out of the installation.

“The gates are a significant emotional event for the community,” said Air Force Lt. Col. Sarah Bodenheimer, 355th Civil Engineer Squadron commander. “You are talking about people’s time: time in traffic, time to get on base and their ease of access to the base.”

Air Force civil engineers and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers coordinate closely to solve the nation’s toughest engineering challenges.

“The South Gate groundbreaking represents our continued support for the U.S. Air Force and all our military partners as the premier engineering and construction solution,” said Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, Los Angeles District deputy commander. “Delivering quality projects safely, on time and within budget.”

The Tucson Area Office, which is located

[‘PARTNERS’ continued on Page 5](#)

Safety Hero of the Month



Courtesy photo

Sonia Valdivia, administrative support assistant with the Operations Division, is the Los Angeles District Safety Hero of the Month for demonstrated extraordinary dedication to the district's mission of completing physicals, audiograms, vaccines and other medical requirements for LA District employees. Not only has she taken on the Government Purchase Card efforts for Operations Division employees, but she is always willing to assist with payment of medical services for other employees throughout the district. Valdivia has actively assisted the district's occupational health nurse with creating a seamless process to purchase and pay for these services. Her quick responses and knowledge of the GPC Program has expedited the Medical Surveillance Program and allowed the LA District to meet its goal of providing the medical services to all employees as required by Engineer Regulation 385-1-40 and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Safety and Occupational Health Management System, or CE-SOHMS.



CORRECTION: In the July 2024 issue of *The NewsCastle*, there were inaccuracies in the way the length of service was reported for LA District employee Steve Weiss and his father during his Civilian Service Commendation Medal presentation July 24. Weiss, who has worked for the district for more than 23 years, is a second-generation Los Angeles District employee. His father, Ronald Weiss, worked for the LA District for 36 and a half years and, previously, served in the Army for three years. So, between both men, they have more than 62 years of combined service to the nation and counting, as Steve continues his family's legacy with the district and USACE.

Official publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District

August 2024
Volume 47, Issue 8

District Commander:
Col. Andrew Baker

Public Affairs Chief:
Dena M. O'Dell

Editor: Stephen Baack

Contributing Editors:
Areca T. Wilson, Robert DeDeaux,
Dan Collins

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
Room 1105, 915 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90017-2325

Email the Public Affairs Office at:
publicaffairs.SPL@usace.army.mil



Labor Day weekend, SPL Shoutouts, Combined Federal Campaign

Hey, SPL Team!

I hope everyone had a safe and restorative 2024 Labor Day weekend! It's one of my favorite times to recharge, and it signals the unofficial end of summer and a shift into slightly cooler weather (not so much in Southern California or Arizona!), a readjustment to the children being back in school and a ton of fun fall celebrations like Halloween and Thanksgiving not far away on the horizon.

Labor Day weekend is a prime time to rest up and recharge for setting out together on the final journey toward the end of the fiscal year. To put it mildly, this is a busy time for SPL! I'm impressed by you every day, so I have full confidence we'll be able to come together, roll up our sleeves and deliver the program as we wrap up the year.

I'm thoroughly enjoying the monthly Commander's Coffee, which is getting fantastic participation and deep, meaningful engagement. It gives me the perfect opportunity to find out what's on your mind, and it gives employees a safe way to share their honest thoughts with leaders and each other — and



COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

receive immediate feedback! Every time we've done a Commander's Coffee, it's led to important discussions that, in turn, lead to better ways of doing business at SPL! The next Commander's Coffee is scheduled for Sept. 11 at 8 a.m.

Speaking of engagement, I'm excited to announce the launch of a new feature on the SPL SharePoint page that lets employees express their appreciation and gratitude for each other in a quick, informal way with everyone in the LA District. Do you know of a fellow employee who's done a great job and deserves a shoutout? This is a great place to do it! Please see the graphic below for the location of the SPL Shoutouts button on the front page of the district's SharePoint page. The feature is available now, and I highly encourage you to recognize someone in the district with a compliment, kudos, recognition, etc., while mentioning the employee's name and describing the achievement or why you decided to highlight the person. Feel free to enter your name, or you can remain anonymous.

We hope this new feature will bring us closer together as a team and gives your

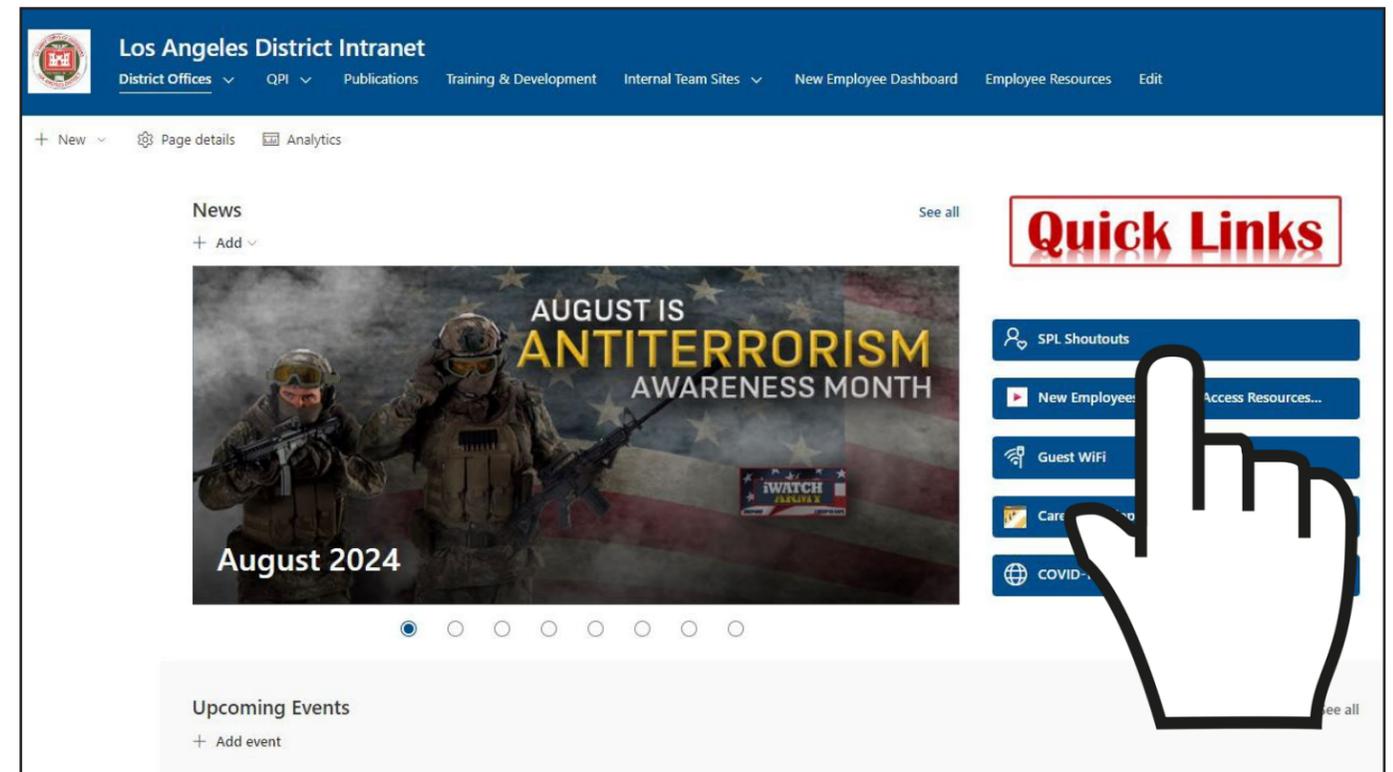
coworkers a way to sing your praises (and vice-versa), especially for those unsung heroes out there. If you have any questions or need assistance, please reach out to the Public Affairs Office.

Keep in mind this feature is intended solely for sharing positive feedback, compliments and appreciation. For addressing problems or concerns, SPL has more suitable options, such as raising the issue during the Commander's Coffee, using the Command Team Suggestion Box, scheduling a one-on-one meeting, bringing it up during a departmental meeting or using the chain of command.

Last, but certainly not least, the Combined Federal Campaign runs from Sept. 1 through Jan. 15. Please expect more information and outreach on this topic, but the LA District's goal is to raise at least \$2,500 from at least 200 contributors (this would average \$14 per donation) in that timeframe. Learn more about how to give — and plenty of reasons to give — at <https://givecfc.org>. There's also a way to donate by texting 978-487-5678!

Proud to be SPL!

Col. Andrew Baker



Regulatory Division teammates lead Phoenix charity efforts

BY ROBERT DEDEAUX
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PHOENIX — For Los Angeles District Regulatory Division teammates Therese Carpenter and Lisa Robinson, the joy of working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is only surpassed by their continuous support of local charities.

Carpenter, a regulatory project manager, and Robinson, a regulatory assistant, discussed the positive impact district volunteers and donations have on charitable organizations in central Arizona July 30.

“I have a heart for giving,” said Carpenter, Arizona State alum. “The course of a person’s life can be changed by one simple act, and you can be that catalyst. We often don’t get the privilege of knowing how our acts help, but that is really the core definition of selflessness: We don’t have to know; we just do it.”

The district’s Phoenix Area Office regulatory team started giving toiletry items to local charities several years ago and continue to coordinate donation efforts between the district and local charities.

“The Arizona Regulatory group started making donations shortly after I started with the Corps about seven years ago,” said Carpenter, who specializes in chemistry and environmental remediation in her daily duties. “I brought the idea to my chief, who wholeheartedly supported it from the start. We started with toiletry donations for the Sojourner Domestic Violence Shelter, did some holiday giving, and have continued toiletry donations as an ongoing community service effort ever since.”

As more employees joined the efforts, the team reached out to more organizations.

“A few of the local charities we support are Maggie’s Place, UMOM and the Phoenix Children’s Hospital,” said Robinson, a native of Poplar Bluff, Missouri.

Maggie’s Place, which provides safe housing for homeless pregnant women, has operated in Phoenix for 23 years. Founded in 1964, UMOM provides shelter, emergency support and job education and placement services. Phoenix Children’s Hospital has provided nationally recognized inpatient, outpatient, trauma, emergency and urgent care to children and families in Arizona and throughout the Southwest for more than 35 years.

“There is a single driving force behind everything we do: the fundamental belief that every human being, no matter his or her status, deserves dignity, respect and a home,” said UMOM CEO Jackson Fonder in a posted



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Los Angeles District Regulatory Division teammates Therese Carpenter and Lisa Robinson pose for a photo at the Phoenix Area Office July 22 in midtown Phoenix. Carpenter, a regulatory project manager, and Robinson, a regulatory assistant, discussed the positive impact district volunteers and donations have on charitable organizations in central Arizona.

statement. “We spend every day working to make that vision become a reality.”

Phoenix area office employees wanting to support local charities through the Phoenix Regulatory Office should understand that it’s not a Regulatory Division function.

“We are just two concerned Arizona residents, who share a desire to help those in need and want to give our coworkers the same opportunity by making the process easier,” said

Parker, who has lived in Arizona for 17 years.

Robinson and Carpenter emphasized donations must be voluntary, nonfinancial and done on, before, after or during authorized break times.

“I am grateful for those that have the capacity to give and choose to do so,” Carpenter said. “We never know when a simple act can change the course of a person’s life. Even a smile to a stranger can make a huge difference.”

‘PARTNERS’ continued from Page 1

on the installation, is currently working on 11 projects at Davis-Monthan, the City of Tucson and Pima County. Most of the projects fall under the Military Construction program.

“The Tucson team is a hard-working group of professionals, who care about our military,” said USACE Tucson Area Office Resident Engineer Bill Crockett. “We and the 355th Civil Engineer Squadron provide innovative solutions while maintaining the operational security when dealing with sensitive military construction projects.”

Crockett, a USACE employee since 1982, also worked closely with the squadron as the South Wilmot Gate project manager.

“I have a high opinion of the Corps of Engineers,” said Bodenheimer, who deployed three times attached to the U.S. Army. “We have a good relationship with the Corps here, and I look forward to them continuing to meet our high expectation on projects.”

The gate construction and inspection facility are projected to be completed before spring 2026.

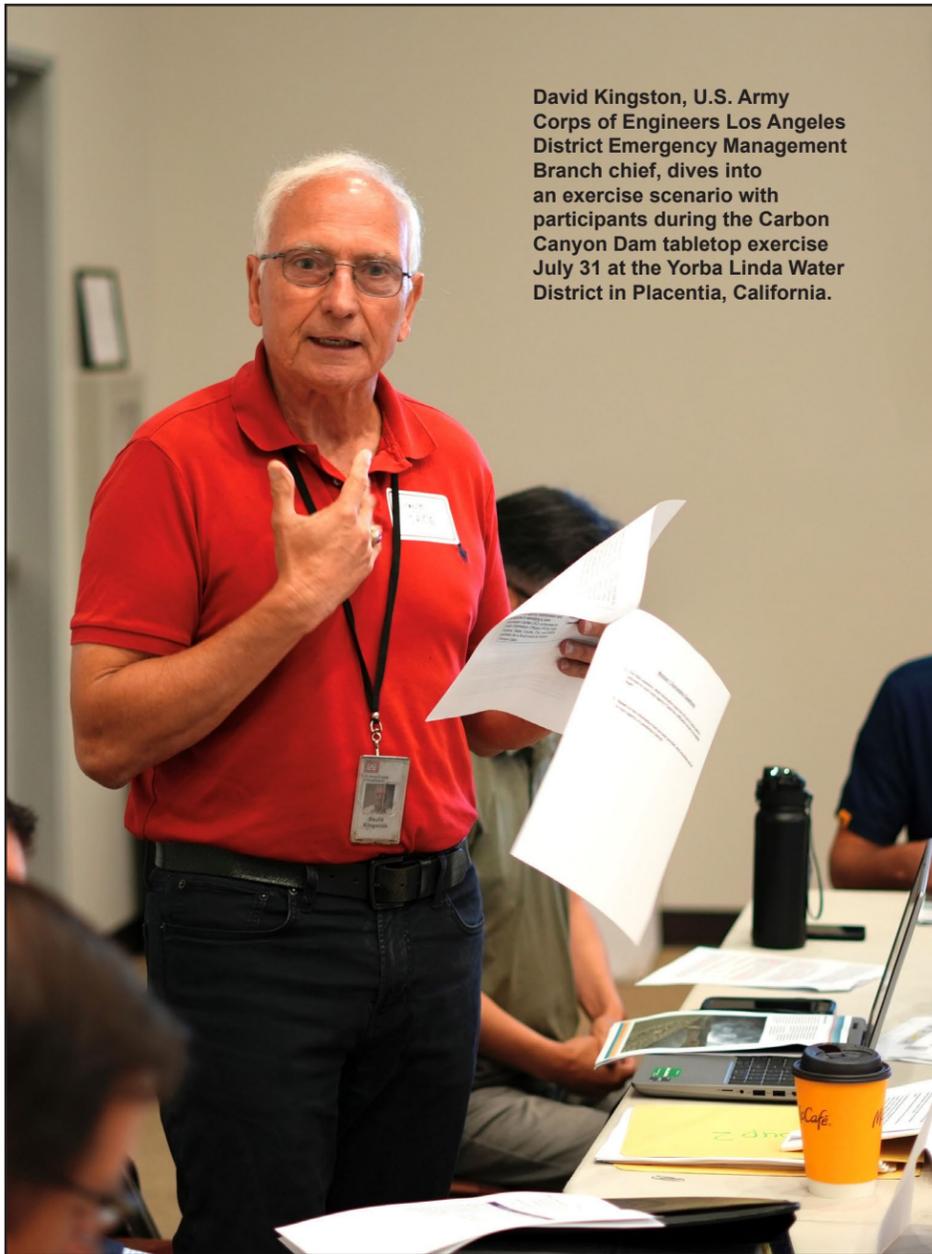


Photos by Robert DeDeaux

Military leaders with the Army and Air Force stand together for a photo following the new South Wilmot Gate project groundbreaking ceremony Aug. 23 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona. The \$15 million project will include a vehicle inspection facility and updated security measures, while easing traffic flow in and out of the installation.



Los Angeles District Deputy Commander Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, left, expresses the importance of Army and Air Force coordination during the new South Wilmot Gate project groundbreaking ceremony Aug. 23 at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona.



David Kingston, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Emergency Management Branch chief, dives into an exercise scenario with participants during the Carbon Canyon Dam tabletop exercise July 31 at the Yorba Linda Water District in Placentia, California.

CARBON CANYON DAM TABLETOP EXERCISE

Yorba Linda emergency exercise unites USACE partners, stakeholders



ABOVE: Ken Lawler, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles hydraulics civil engineer, left of center, discusses an exercise scenario with participants during the Carbon Canyon Dam tabletop exercise July 31 at the Yorba Linda Water District in Placentia, California. RIGHT: Louie Muñoz, LA District emergency management specialist, third from left, discusses the exercise scenario with fellow group members



STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEPHEN BAACK
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PLACENTIA, Calif. — More than 40 representatives from federal, state, county and local agencies participated in a Carbon Canyon Dam tabletop exercise July 31 at the Yorba Linda Water District in Placentia, California.

The discussion-based exercise, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, was designed to enhance interagency coordination and procedures during emergency operations in the event of an extreme storm that affects the dam’s downstream communities. The exercise was also meant to cover the roles and responsibilities required during a switch from normal operations to emergency operations in conjunction with USACE Reservoir Regulations.

Highlighting the effort of flood-risk management, emergency managers, emergency responders and public information officers from various agencies such as the California Office of Emergency Services, Orange County Sheriff’s Department, City of Brea, U.S. National Weather Service and USACE participated in the exercise.

“All these exercises are valuable, and this one was no exception,” said David Kingston, LA District Emergency Operations Branch chief, who was sharing a table with representatives from both the LA District and the South Pacific Division, Cal OES, and nearby city and county agencies. “Some of these people had never met each other. As a result of this exercise, we all know a lot better what we all do, and we got some great input on how to make our Emergency Action Plan for Carbon Canyon Dam a lot better with this direct input.”

[‘TRAINING’ continued on Page 7](#)

[‘TRAINING’ continued from Page 6](#)

Informing USACE’s external partners about its Dam Safety Program and providing updates about inundation mapping also were major objectives of the exercise.

“Regardless of the stakeholder, everybody needs to have the same information, so they can protect their local communities,” said Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, LA District deputy commander, who participated in the exercise. “That’s what it’s all about, really: establishing what the situation is, what we’re going to do about it, how we’re go-

ing to mitigate risk — and accept some risk — and follow-on actions once the emergency is completed.”

Carbon Canyon Dam, which is located near the northern edge of Orange County, was built and is owned and operated by the LA District. The dam has been operating as intended since opening in 1961. Nevertheless, the LA District regularly works with partners like the Yorba Linda Water District to host these types of exercises that often walk stakeholders through emergency scenarios caused by extreme weather events.

“This is the second tabletop exercise I’ve attended, but they’re absolutely critical because it’s not a matter of ‘if,’ but ‘when’ for these types of emergencies,” Brooks said. “So, it’s important for all our stakeholders to understand how we operate with respect to primary duties for our Emergency Operations Center, our Reservoir Operations Center, the synergy between those offices and how they delineate the information to establish a shared understanding.”



Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, Los Angeles District deputy commander, talks to attendees of the Carbon Canyon Dam tabletop exercise July 31 at the Yorba Linda Water District in Placentia, California. Books stressed the importance of interagency emergency preparedness.



Photo by Areca T. Wilson

December Winters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District occupational health nurse, runs the Occupational Health and Wellness programs, which provide services to LA District employees. These services include the Ergonomic Program, health-focused newsletters, setting up activities, such as monthly Walking Wednesdays and massages, and managing the gym.

Don't miss out on LA District's health, wellness offerings

BY ARECA T. WILSON
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LOS ANGELES — Regular physical activity can positively affect human health. For some, this source of physical activity may come in many forms, such as daily walks in the park, dance workouts in their living room or a swim in their apartment complex's pool. For many, it's a gym, but, in most cases, it costs money.

Fortunately, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District employees can sidestep these costs. Tucked away in the quiet corridors of the 14th floor at 915 Wilshire, the LA District's gym is a convenient and free resource for employees, even during work hours.

"(Through the fitness and health program policy), everyone is entitled, with supervisor approval, to use up to 80 hours a calendar

year of leave to work out, so you can use three hours a week spread out over three days," said December Winters, USACE LA District occupational health nurse. "It really helps with your work-life balance — it is such a benefit to us, and I don't know if a lot of people are aware of that."

As the district's occupational nurse, Winters runs the Medical Surveillance Program, which provides medical services to employees related to their job duties, such as the Respiratory Protection Program and Hearing Conservation Program for Operations Division employees. Another part of Winters' duties focuses on occupational health and wellness, which provides services for all, such as the Ergonomic Program, health-focused newsletters, setting up activities, such as monthly Walking Wednesdays and massages, and managing the gym.

Given that the gym is not actively moni-

tored, members are required to sign a liability waiver before using it. The waiver can be found on the Safety Office's SharePoint under "Health and Wellness." The gym is "open" if the member has building access.

The gym has a treasure trove of amenities commonly found in a commercial setting. Lockers, showers, a yoga room, and a cardio and strength training area are all at employees' disposal. Both workout areas are stocked with a plethora of items, including exercise bikes, treadmills, weight machines, free weights, Ping-Pong tables, punching bags and more. Patrons also can enjoy their workout with their favorite music or workout DVDs in the yoga room.

"It's recommended that people do at least 150 minutes a week of cardiovascular exercise. I think working out in our gym is very

['HEALTH' continued on Page 9](#)



"It's been studied and shown that working out really improves your quality of life and can add years to your life as well — that's why I would very much encourage people to use the facilities."

— December Winters, LA District occupational health nurse

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District members participate in a yoga session Aug. 28 at the LA District's headquarters. During the 45-minute session, the members followed a guided video, which worked on both strength and cardio. According to the National Institutes of Health, "Studies have suggested possible benefits of yoga for several aspects of wellness, including stress management, mental/emotional health, promoting healthy eating/activity habits, sleep, and balance."

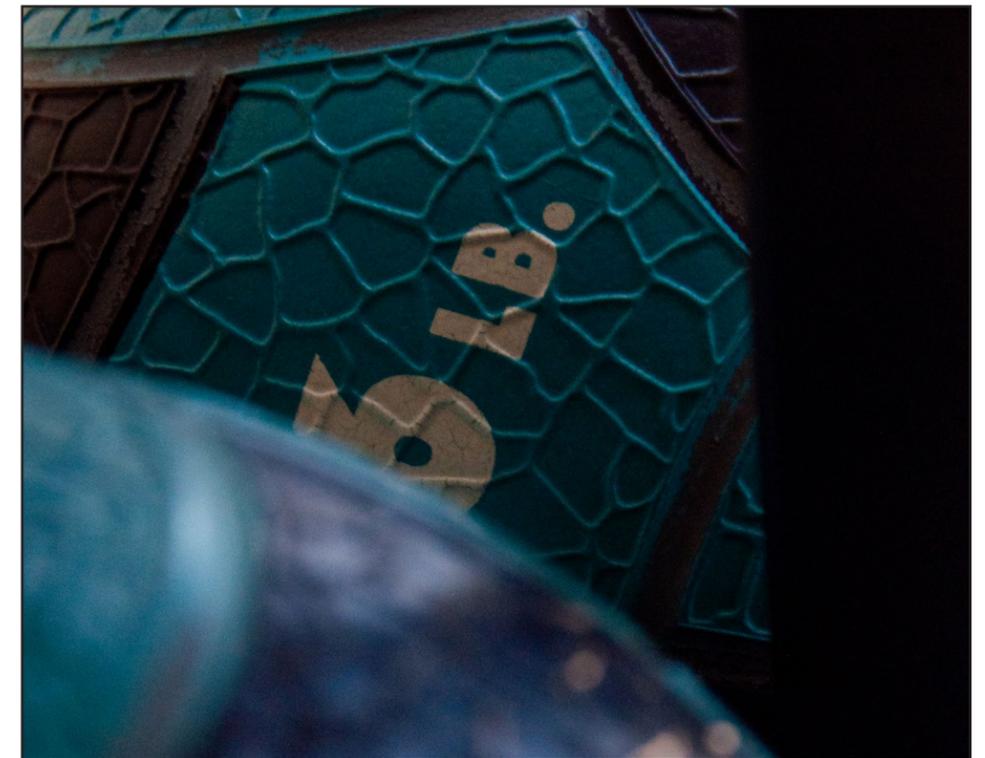
Photos by Areca T. Wilson

['HEALTH' continued from Page 8](#)

important because you can get a good 30 minutes to an hour done at work using your fitness leave," Winters said. "The gym provides a convenience for people because a lot of times, once you get home, you're busy, so it's really nice. It's been studied and shown that working out really improves your quality of life and can add years to your life as well — that's why I would very much encourage people to use the facilities."

Looking forward, Winters hopes to establish a Wellness Committee to develop ideas to get more people involved in caring for their health. Also, in the coming fiscal year, starting twice a month, a fitness instructor will be on site, possibly more, depending on participation. The instructor will offer yoga and strength-training classes for those looking to attend group-focused physical activities.

"I have an open-door policy," Winters said. "If you have questions related to working out or how to get started or any questions about using the facility — I'm always there, so reach out to me any time."



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District has a gym available for employee use, free of charge at its headquarters in Los Angeles. The gym has a treasure trove of amenities commonly found in a commercial setting, including lockers, showers, a yoga room, and a cardio and strength-training area, which are all at employees' disposal.

National Preparedness Month: When disaster strikes, it's too late to plan!

BY CHRIS RAINWATER
SAFETY OFFICE CHIEF

Every September in the U.S. is observed as National Preparedness Month — an effort to raise awareness about the importance of planning for disasters. This year's theme is “Start a Conversation” — an appropriate theme given the enormous effects the failure to plan can have on you and your family.

As the recent earthquake centered in South Pasadena reminded us, in the event of a disaster such as an earthquake, fire or flood, there is often little time to react. If you're waiting for the disaster to strike before you frantically start grabbing things and heading for the car, you've waited too long. Instead, now is a great time to consider the following:

Do you have a disaster kit? If not, now is the time to build one! What should be in the kit, and where should you store the kit? Should you

have more than one kit? As to what should be in your kit, consider visiting FEMA's Ready.gov page for comprehensive checklists and things to consider. When determining where you should store the kit, remember that you never know where you will be when disaster strikes. Obviously, you should have a kit at home, but you also may want to keep a kit in your vehicle and at your office.

When thinking about your plan, remember to consider these important factors:

- How will you be alerted to the disaster? Do you have one of the alert systems on your phone?
- Do all members of your family also have the alert system on their phones? You may not be together when the alerts are issued.
- What is your family's plan for evacuation if it becomes necessary? Where

will you go, and how would you get there?

- Does your kit have adequate food, water and medications that you or your family members need?
- If you have pets, how will you care for them? Have you considered their needs when building your disaster kit?
- Have you identified important documents you would need to take with you in an evacuation? Are they readily available?
- How will you ensure the needs of persons with disabilities or the elderly are met?

Regrettably, disasters are a fact of life everywhere, and they seldom afford us an opportunity to be ready. Take advantage of National Preparedness Month and the [Ready.Gov](https://www.ready.gov) website to make your plan and build your kits today.



The Time to Prepare is Now

Gather supplies for your family, pets and service animals.

- ✔ Food & water
- ✔ Medications
- ✔ Flashlights
- ✔ Chargers
- ✔ IDs & insurance documents



Ready .gov

September marks National Preparedness Month, the annual campaign to remind everyone that preparing for emergencies and disasters can keep them, their families and their communities safe.

Click on the icons below to connect with SPL on social media!



New Employee Corner: Meet Tyler Fehrman

What is your name and title?

My name is Tyler Fehrman, and I am a realty specialist for the Phoenix-area office.

Where are you from?

I am originally from Fredericksburg, Virginia, and I now reside in Phoenix.

Why did you decide to work for USACE?

I decided to work for USACE because of the various infrastructure projects that are integral to the U.S.

What do you like most about your team?

The thing I enjoy most about my team is the cohesive atmosphere. For every project, there is a real sense of teamwork to complete the task at hand.

What do you like most about working for USACE?

The thing I like most about working for USACE is the people and the feeling of accomplishment when a project is completed.

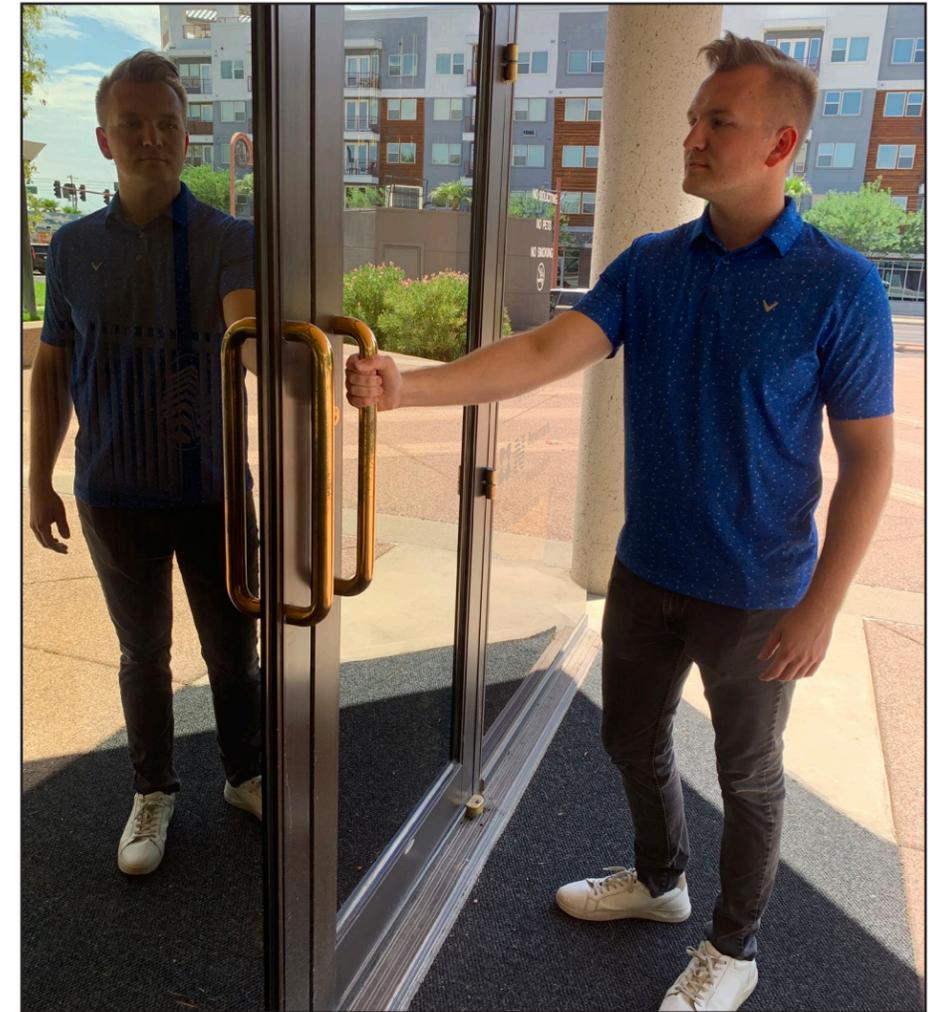


Photo by Robert DeDeaux



Around the District

“We see the tangible benefits our projects provide for the local sponsors; whether it's maintaining ports that play a huge role in our nation's economy or replenishing a beach for the public's enjoyment, our work is critical for everyone.”

Brian works on several harbor and port projects in California. He is an Army veteran from Cypress, California. Brian has worked with the Los Angeles District's Navigation Branch for 16 months.

Brian Kim
Project Manager



GIVE HAPPY



Donate today at GiveCFC.org

Each fall, the Combined Federal Campaign enables federal employees and retirees to come together to raise money and volunteer for our favorite charities. It's amazing to see how giving a little from each paycheck adds up to so much happiness when we give together.

The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee-focused, cost-efficient, and effective in providing all federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all.

CFC is one of the world's largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaigns, with 35 CFC campaigns throughout the country and overseas raising millions of dollars each year. Pledges made by Federal civilian, postal and military donors during the campaign season will support eligible non-profit organizations that provide health and human service benefits throughout the world. The Director of OPM has designated responsibility for day-to-day management of the program and to its CFC office.

Thanks to your generosity, the CFC has raised \$8.7 billion since its inception to support people and communities in need across the country and around the world! New to the CFC? Give it a try — just \$5 per paycheck to your favorite charity makes a big difference.