

# Crosscurrents

Serving the St. Paul District since 1977  
Vol. 51, Issue 3 | Summer 2025



St. Paul District  
welcomes  
Col. Matthew Chase  
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US Army Corps  
of Engineers®  
St. Paul District



**(cover)** Col. Matthew Chase, St. Paul District commander, accepts the St. Paul District flag from Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples, Mississippi Valley Division commander, during a change of command ceremony, July 18, in St. Paul, Minnesota. USACE St. Paul District photo by Patrick Moes

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Articles and photography submissions are welcome. Submissions may be emailed. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word format. Photos should be at least 5 in. x 7 in. at 300 dpi.

The mission of *Crosscurrents* is to support the commander's internal information program for the St. Paul District and its stakeholders. *Crosscurrents* also serves as the commander's primary communication tool for accurately transmitting policies and command philosophy to the St. Paul District community and

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# Comments from the top: A message from Col. Matthew Chase

MVP Teammates,

First and foremost, I'd like to offer my sincere appreciation for the very warm welcome to the St. Paul District. The hospitality started back in March when I did my first visit St. Paul to receive an initial overview of the district, and that warmth carried through the change of command in July. I received a great hand off from Col. Swenson and the front office team has done a masterful job of creating a plan to accelerate my knowledge of district operations and to meet you - the incredible workforce that powers this district. As I noted in the town hall – Mission, Value, People – remains the core of our identity as a district and provides a great framework for me to share observations from my first month in command.

**Mission.** It's been a busy month! I've had the chance to see the amazing work being accomplished on the Fargo-Moorhead Area Flood Diversion Project, which included celebrating the milestone of re-routing the Red River. I've also had the opportunity to tour other flood mitigation projects along the Red River, as well as on the Minnesota River and in Headwaters region. I

humbly participated in and observed Mikwendaagoziwag, an Ojibwe ceremony to remember the tragedy that happened at Sandy Lake in 1850. And in the past week, I was honored to represent the U.S. on a board for the International Joint Commission, an organization charged with solving transnational challenges with Canada in the Boundary Waters. Each of these events were distinct and they illustrated the wide range of important missions this district is charged with executing.

**Value.** Each of these events mentioned above are important and impactful. Our efforts will better protect the people and businesses in the Fargo-Moorhead region from severe flooding. We are supporting culturally significant events for the indigenous people in our region. And we are addressing complex transnational water management issues. These are just a small sample of the impact the St. Paul District is making and value we are demonstrating through the execution of our missions.

**People.** My #1 takeaway from my first month in command is that we have an incredible team in the St. Paul District. The professionalism, the knowledge, and the motivation I saw during every engagement was exceptional. And these aren't just my observations – they are reflected in the feedback I've received from stakeholders and partners over the course of the month. We truly have a world-class workforce!

In conclusion, please remember that 1) what we do is important (Mission), 2) it matters to someone (Value), and 3) it doesn't get done without you (People)! I couldn't be more excited to be a part of this team of MVPs that is out there making an impact every day – its greatly appreciated and definitely noticed.

-Col. Matt Chase



# Comments from the top: A message from Col. Eric Swenson

Teammates,

It's hard to believe that this will be my last *Crosscurrents* editorial! It's been the honor of a lifetime serving as your district commander these past three years. I appreciate everyone who could attend the change of command ceremony, either in person or online. It was great seeing many of you. Thank you to Maj. Gen. Kim Peeples for presiding over the ceremony and for always being an inspiring leader.

Our accomplishments over the last three years are too many to list here but just know that they were many. We successfully served the people of five states and strengthened our relationship with indigenous nations as well as with Canada, through the International Joint Commission.

We worked tirelessly to keep the Mississippi River open and maintained critical infrastructure when mother nature dictated that it be closed. We worked with our local, state and federal partners to advance flood risk management, including staying on time and on budget with our Fargo-Moorhead project.

The motto of the Corps of Engineers is *Essayons*, which means "let us try." To me, that motto means, when no one else can do it, then let US try. The Corps of Engineers steps up when there's a need for our expertise and dedication. Over 500 St. Paul District teammates responded to the call and deployed in support of natural disasters during my tenure.

When Maj. Gen. Kim Peeples called on me to support Maui after the wildfires in August 2023, I said "let US try." Again, after wildfires ripped through Los Angeles, I received another call and I said, "let US try." When no one else can do something, the Corps of Engineers steps up with unwavering commitment. That's how we were able to accomplish a historically fast and SAFE debris removal in cleanup in Los Angeles.

A special thanks to Lt. Col. Josh Rud, Karl Jansen and countless others, who stepped up to the plate while I was deployed to both Maui and Los Angeles. You kept the district running like a well-coordinated lock and dam system.

Finally, a hearty Midwest welcome to Col. Matt Chase. I know you will welcome him and his family with open arms and that I am leaving the district in capable hands.

As for me, I will be heading to Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York, where I will be the Corps of Engineers North Atlantic Division deputy commander. I'm excited to be reunited with my family again. I hope that I will get to work with many of you again. Remember, it's not goodbye, it's just see you later.

Respectfully,

Col. Eric Swenson



# Col. Matthew Chase assumes command of the St. Paul District

*Story by Renwick Martin*

Col. Matthew B. Chase assumed command of the St. Paul District from Col. Eric Swenson July 18, becoming the district's 68th commander and district engineer. The ceremony was presided over by Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples, Mississippi Valley Division commanding general.

Prior to assuming this command, Chase most recently served as the executive officer to the director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

A Maryland native, Chase earned his commission from the United States Military Academy, West Point, in 2002 and is an Army Corps of Engineers officer with over 23 years of service specializing in leadership, engineering and education. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Systems Engineering from West Point; a Master of Science in Engineering Management from the Missouri University of Science and Technology; a Master of Science in Civil Engineering from Stanford University, and a Master of Science in National Security and Strategic Studies from the National War College.

The St. Paul District covers most of Minnesota, the western half of Wisconsin, the northeastern half of North Dakota and small portions of northeastern South Dakota and northeastern Iowa. It



*(front to back) Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples, Mississippi Valley Division commander; Col. Matthew Chase, incoming St. Paul District commander; and Col. Eric Swenson, outgoing St. Paul District commander, depart the change of command ceremony, July 18, in St. Paul, Minnesota, USACE St. Paul District photo by Patrick Moes*

has missions in the areas of flood risk management, navigation, environmental management, regulation, disaster response and recreation.

The district traces its origins to 1866, when Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to establish a 4-foot navigation channel on the Upper Mississippi River. Maj. Gouverneur K. Warren, a West Point graduate widely acclaimed for his leadership at the Battle of Gettysburg, was tasked with establishing the district and conducting preliminary surveys of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Warren arrived in St. Paul and opened the first district office in August 1866.

Swenson will become the Corps of Engineers, North Atlantic Division, deputy commander. The division is located is headquartered at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York.

# St. Paul District hosts change of command

USACE St. Paul District photos by Shannon Bauer, Ren Martin and Patrick Moes



# St. Paul District hosts change of command

USACE St. Paul District photos by Shannon Bauer and Melanie Peterson



# District counsel and assistant district counsel selected for national awards

*Stories by Ren Martin*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters recently selected St. Paul District employee John Carrell as the recipient of the Bert Pettinato/Barb Lollar Award.

The award recognizes a USACE attorney who demonstrates the ideals of “pride in public service” through leadership, concern for people and a personal belief that public service is both a noble calling and a public trust.

Carrell joined the St. Paul District in 2017 and serves as the district counsel. He is responsible for providing legal advice to the district for issues including regulatory, civil works, contracting and government ethics. Prior to joining the district, he served in the U.S. Army as a staff judge advocate.

Carrell received his Juris Doctor from the William Mitchell College of Law, in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a Master of Strategic Studies from U.S. Army War College, in Carlisle, Virginia.

“John’s leadership during numerous staffing changes in the office has been both inspiring and instrumental in maintaining a cohesive and efficient team,” said Karl Jansen, St. Paul District deputy for programs and project management.



*John Carrell, district counsel*

“In addition to his numerous professional accomplishments, John is also known for his unwavering concern for people. He consistently goes above and beyond to support and mentor his staff while fostering an environment of mutual respect and collaboration.”

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters selected St. Paul District assistant district counsel, Jilliane Jaeger, as the recipient of the Joseph W. Kimbel Award.

The award recognizes a USACE attorney who demonstrates the highest professional potential for future legal achievement.



*Jilliane Jaeger, assistant district counsel*

Jaeger joined the St. Paul District in 2019. As assistant district counsel, Jaeger is an active member of the Mississippi Valley Division Labor and Employment Law community of practice and regularly provides advice in the areas of employment law, labor law and discrimination law. Prior to working for the Corps of Engineers, she worked for the General Services Administration after serving on active duty as a judge advocate for the U.S. Army.

“Jilliane represents all of the best traits as an exceptional attorney and recipient of the Joseph W. Kimbel Award for highest potential,” said John Carrell, district counsel. “She has continued to shine as a selfless civil servant providing the highest quality of legal services to the St. Paul District. She is highly motivated to help the district accomplish its mission. As a ‘Rising Star’ in the legal services community, her reputation for problem solving, training assistance and superior client relations is second to none. A truly well-deserved award!”

Jaeger received her bachelor’s in music business from Indiana State University, in Terre Haute, Indiana, and her Juris Doctor from the Hamline University School of Law, in St. Paul, Minnesota.



# Corps of Engineers selects resident engineer for national award

*Story by Ren Martin*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters selected Maj. Kyle Volk, Western Area Office resident engineer, as its 2025 recipient of the Construction Management Excellence Award.

The Construction Management Excellence Award is a national award that recognizes construction personnel exhibiting excellence in construction management – contract administration activities. This award focuses on full-service construction management leadership, including monitoring the submittal register, initiating and updating contract records and monitoring and tracking contract milestones and progress.

Volk was honored in large part for his work on the Fargo, North Dakota / Moorhead, Minnesota, Metro Area Project. He's the subject matter expert for managing numerous challenges with the project. Additionally, he completed the district's first risk analysis of a project during construction. His risk register model and the analysis process have become the district's standard for analyzing risks during construction.

"Maj. Kyle Volk is the first military resident engineer in the St. Paul District, and we are fortunate to have him," said Virginia Regorrah, St. Paul District Western Area Engineer Branch chief and Volk's supervisor. "He has taken the lead on resolving multiple difficult, contentious and technical issues. He's been at the forefront of new and innovative management techniques, and he's become the primary spokesperson for the Fargo Moorhead Project for the media and for the political entities. Within the office, his sense of humor makes this a great place to work."

Volk has been with the St. Paul District since 2021. Prior to working at the district, he served in multiple roles within the U.S. Army to include deployments to both Afghanistan and Iraq. Volk holds an associate's degree in construction technology, bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and master's degree in homeland security and emergency management. He is a Certified Project Management Professional and Certified Building Code Official.



*Maj. Kyle Volk, Western Area Office resident engineer, supports the flood fight in Valley City, North Dakota, April 25, 2022. USACE St. Paul District photo by Patrick Moes*

# Hydraulic engineer selected for national award

*Story by Renwick Martin*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters selected Leigh Youngblood, Ph.D., hydraulic engineer, as its 2025 recipient of the Resilience Role Model Award for her innovation, creativity and collaboration within the infrastructure and installation resilience community.

The national award recognizes a Corps of Engineers employee or team for showing consistent leadership and understanding of weather-related impacts and risks.

Youngblood was selected in part for her work on the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program. She was instrumental in her role as a collaborator to develop a reliable future hydrology data product to support resilient management actions. Youngblood's contributions also include the development of updated technical guidance, co-authorship of a literature review on non-stationary hydrology, data product evaluations, and sharing of her expertise on USACE project evaluation methodology and tools for water resources resilience in the Midwest.



“Dr. Youngblood is an exemplary engineer, and it has been a privilege to work with her since she joined the district in 2020,” said Heather Henneman, St. Paul District hydraulics and hydrology branch chief and Youngblood’s supervisor. “She is an excellent communicator and a natural leader who has a record of coming up with and executing innovative solutions.”

Youngblood has worked on a variety of studies and risk assessments since joining the Corps of Engineers. She holds a bachelor’s degree in civil and biosystems engineering from, Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, in civil engineering. She is a licensed professional engineer in Minnesota.

*Leigh Youngblood, Ph.D., hydraulic engineer, Jan. 11, 2022. USACE St. Paul District courtesy photo*

# St. Paul District personnel deploy to Los Angeles

*Story by Melanie Peterson*

Devastating wildfires ravaged Los Angeles County in Altadena and the Pacific Palisades Jan. 7 and 8. The fires burned more than 50,000 acres and destroyed more than 16,000 structures, making it one of the most destructive wildfires in California's history.

Col. Eric Swenson, former St. Paul District commander, arrived in Los Angeles Jan. 12, to provide support while the wildfires were still smoldering. Although the Corps of Engineers did not have a debris mission from the Federal Emergency Management Agency yet, Swenson and a team of technical experts, were positioned to respond if there was a need – and it turned out there was.

It would only be five days later that USACE received the debris mission from FEMA. Just 3.5 weeks after the fire, USACE started the first debris removal project on Feb. 1, in partnership with Los Angeles County, California Office of Emergency Services, FEMA and other partners.

Swenson, who would become the Recovery Field Office commander, said that he wanted USACE to partner with the local community and with the survivors. "This is about leading with your heart and providing a hand to help survivors get back on their feet," he said. "We are leading this effort at a record-setting pace and doing so safely, so survivors can begin the process of rebuilding."

Swenson also served as the Recovery Field Office commander in Maui following the wildfires of Aug. 8, 2023. He said he brought a lot of that experience, and the lessons learned to the Southern California recovery mission.

Swenson was not the only person from St. Paul District who answered the call to respond to this mission. Over the course of about six months, 23 St. Paul District employees deployed to the Los Angeles area with three on reachback to provide additional support. During his three years with the St. Paul District, over 500 people deployed for disaster recovery.

"We're proud of the response of our volunteers and their commitment to selflessly serving across the nation," Jim Rand, readiness operations center chief, said.

Lewis Wiechmann, a biologist with the St. Paul District, served as a quality assurance inspector in the Pacific Palisades area of California, in June. Wiechmann said his role was to oversee the contractors removing debris and make sure that they adhered to the contract. "A huge part of what we do is ensure the safety standards are met," Wiechmann said. "Safety is always our number one priority. Public safety as well as the safety of our employees and contractors."

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*Brig. Gen. William Hannan, Task Force Phoenix commander, presents Ed Bradley, St. Paul District security specialist, with a sticker in the Pacific Palisades, California, June 8. USACE St. Paul District photo by Melanie Peterson*

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Paul Fleming, a senior engineering technician with the St. Paul District, served as a local government liaison in Altadena, California, from February to March. Fleming was stationed at the FEMA disaster recovery center #3 in Altadena, where he worked with various government agencies to explain the recovery mission to the public and how to receive assistance as well as answer any questions about the process. “I often joke that we are essentially translators for local communities because we are able to speak both English and government language,” Fleming said.

This mission was incredibly important to the survivors of the Eaton and Palisades fires because in most cases, residents affected by the fire were left with absolutely nothing but the charred remnants of what used to be their homes, Fleming said. “On the most basic level, having someone in-person helping survivors is a crucial first step to building trust in the overall federal recovery response,” he added.

Fleming said the mission was full of incredible people from top to bottom, from the recovery field office to the quality assurance inspectors in the field, everyone was equally committed to help Southern California recover. “Getting to work side-by-side with Los Angeles County was incredibly rewarding as the teamwork allowed us to give survivors the best information about their personal recovery process,” he said.

Fleming added that he deployed in the same role for the wildfire recovery mission in Lahaina, Hawaii, in 2023. He said that in both cases, getting to interact directly with survivors and bringing a little light into people’s lives during some of their darkest hours is something that he will always be proud of.

Tina Shivel, who serves as the occupational nurse in the St. Paul District, deployed to Los Angeles as a critical incident stress management peer supporter in June. In this role, Shivel helped teammates manage the stress, job-related incidents and trauma that are sometimes encountered on emergency operations deployments.

“This humbling experience taught me the value of listening and leading with empathy,” Shivel said. “I was inspired by the many volunteers who stepped up to help people they had never met, demonstrating true dedication and unity.” She added that it was incredible to witness the transformation and to connect with teammates from across the country.

“Always remember that you have two ears for a reason, to listen more than we talk, listen with your heart and be the best you can be at that moment,” Shivel said. “I am incredibly grateful for the camaraderie and support shared during this deployment. We achieved something great together, and I am proud of this team.”



*Aung Win, St. Paul District electrical engineer; poses for a picture with the 119 crew lead and operator in Altadena, California, March 31. USACE St. Paul District courtesy photo*

# A water safety win for the St. Paul District

*Story by Ren Martin*

After a delay due to a shipping catastrophe that left the initial award wrinkled and bruised, the fiscal year 2024 Water Safety Award was finally awarded to the St. Paul District park ranger team after the conclusion of the fishing opener at Cross Lake Recreation Area in Crosslake, Minnesota. On hand were Cross Lake park rangers Ellie Tabako and Aaron Springer, who accepted the award from Lt. Col. Joshua Rud, acting St. Paul District commander, in a small ceremony.

The water safety award, awarded to the entire St. Paul District recreation and natural resources staff, is in recognition of the zero water-related fatalities at St. Paul District recreation areas in fiscal year 2024 (Oct. 2023-Sept. 2024).

This past year there was an emphasis on encouraging visitors to wear life jackets. Several recreation areas took part in the “I Got Caught” initiative, which rewards visitors for wearing a life jacket with various prizes, including beach towels and windshield sunshades. Additionally, life jacket loaner stations were installed at various recreation areas, offering guests an opportunity to borrow a life jacket free of charge.

The Corps recommends all visitors wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket while recreating around water, regardless of your swimming ability. Shawn Weissenfluh, lead park ranger at Sandy Lake Recreation Area, added that it’s not just wearing a life jacket that’s important, but also the fit. “It should fit snugly, and sizing should be based on weight,” Weissenfluh said. A study of water-related accidents shows that 90% of the people in water-related fatalities were not wearing a life jacket.

Weissenfluh said he is most proud of how the recreation and natural resources staff recognizes the importance of talking about water safety, adding that “zero water-related fatalities can, in large part, be attributed to the hard work each employee puts in to promote water safety.”



*(left to right) Lt. Col. Josh Rud, then acting district commander; Corrine Hodapp, supervisory park ranger; Aaron Springer, park ranger; Ellie Tabako, park ranger; Randy Urich, recreation and natural resources chief; and Tamara Cameron, operations division chief, accept the fiscal year 2024 water safety award at Cross Lake Recreation Area in Crosslake, Minnesota, May 10. USACE St. Paul District photo by Ren Martin*

# 'Remarkable outcome': 7 survive getting swept through Genoa dam

*Story by Steve Rundio, La Crosse Tribune, reprinted with permission*

Seven people, including one child, are fortunate to be alive after a harrowing experience on the Mississippi River.

All seven people who abandoned a disabled boat as it headed toward Lock and Dam 8 at Genoa were rescued from the water below the dam thanks to action taken by employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Lock and Dam 8 lockmaster Travis Zabinski said Corps employees Chris Olson and Dave Sudol noticed somebody was paddling the 20-foot Crownline pleasure craft shortly after it passed a 600-foot safety buffer that boaters are warned not to cross.

A disabled boat that had seven passengers came to rest against the dam wall, but the occupants had jumped out and were swept through.

Dam operators immediately knew something was wrong. "Usually when someone is paddling, their engine isn't running," Zabinski said.

The boat, operated by 39-year-old Brandon Kumm of La Crosse, reportedly stalled one to two miles upriver. Public safety officials don't believe there was an attempt to drop anchor as the boat approached the dam.

The Corps closed the dam gates so the boat could safely come to rest against the dam wall. However, all seven passengers jumped into the water and were swept below the Tainter gate before resurfacing below the dam.

"I was looking for heads to come up," Zabinski said. "We didn't know how many people were in the boat."

Olson and Sudol threw life preserver rings into the water, which enabled everyone to climb to safety atop the dam.



*Maj. Gen. Kimberly Peeples (center) Mississippi Valley Division commander, presents Dave Sudol (screen left) and Chris Olson (screen right) with a commander's coin for their quick action at Lock and Dam 8. Also pictured: Col. Eric Swenson (left), former district commander, and Bre Popkin (right), acting deputy chief of operations. USACE St. Paul District photo by Patrick Moes*

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There were no injuries reported, and nobody required medical transport. The boat was carrying the required number of safety devices, but none were worn when the occupants jumped from the boat.

Zabinski urged boaters on the Mississippi River to wear life preservers at all times and carry a two-way marine radio. He said the radio would have allowed the Corps to instruct everyone to remain in the boat.

“We could have talked them through it,” he said.

Vernon County Sheriff Roy Torgerson and Houston County Sheriff Brian Swedberg gave the same advice, along with other safety tips, in a joint press release.

“Remaining inside the boat with life preservers, having phone numbers to locks and dams in areas where you plan to operate, and installation of a marine band radio, though not a requirement for smaller pleasure craft, are other useful and recommended safety tips that would have been advantageous in this situation,” they said.

The two sheriffs said the timely response from the Corps “most certainly saved lives.”

“We always appreciate our teams, support staff, and all first responders, most of which volunteer to serve their communities,” they said. “This collaboration fostered a remarkable outcome.”

The incident remains under investigation by the Houston County Sheriff’s Office with assistance from the Vernon County Sheriff’s Office and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

**RESTRICTED AREAS**  
Lock and Dam Safety

US Army Corps of Engineers®  
St. Paul District

Restricted areas are marked by danger signs and are strictly off-limits to all boaters. Violators are subject to a citation and a fine.

USACE St. Paul District courtesy graphic of lock and dam restricted areas, 150 feet downstream of the dam and 600 feet upstream of the dam.

# From civil works to military construction: St. Paul District meets with Japan Area Office

*Story by Liz Stoeckmann*

John Fromuth, construction control inspector at the Western Area Office, and Mitchell Knegendorf, project engineer at the Eastern Area Office, deployed to Japan District, where they supported military construction projects at Yokota Air Base. Both covered all active USACE projects on Yokota Air Base and contributed to the Japan Engineer District.

“Our work here highlights the continued collaboration between U.S. Army Corps of Engineers districts across the globe, from civil works expertise to mission-critical military infrastructure,” Fromuth said.

Fromuth, deployed as a construction control representative / quality assurance representative for six months, was known for his charismatic personality, leadership and was recognized for his ability to foster a safe, efficient and high-performing jobsite, said Yokota Deputy Resident Engineer Van Wakefield.

“With his depth of experience in construction, he influenced significant positive changes in his projects’ safety programs and overall quality assurance and quality control systems,” he said. “John’s ability to foresee on-site problems saved the contractor and the government from costly errors and ensured our projects, in particular the Yokota C-130J Corrosion Control Hangar, remained on schedule, within scope and on budget.”

Fromuth was also responsible for the safety of an aerial bulk fuel delivery system, combat arms training and maintenance, and improving military family housing projects.

“John has an incredible talent for safety and has personally mentored and coached the site safety and health officers and created a remarkable improvement in their safety program and even received accolades from the USACE safety office,” Wakefield said.

Recognizing the value of teamwork, Fromuth leaned into his deployed partner, Knegendorf, for support when a challenge arose on-site.

“Mitchell immediately knew how to resolve issues, drawing on his technical knowledge and calm problem-solving approach,” Fromuth said.

Knegendorf, deployed for three months as a quality assurance representative, ensured that contractors



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*John Fromuth (left), construction control inspector and Mitchell Knegendorf (right), project engineer, at Yokota C-130J Corrosion Control Hangar, in Japan. USACE courtesy photo*



**Story continued from Page 16**

delivered materials on time, installed them correctly and properly documented the work. He also kept the contracting officer representative informed with timely and accurate updates throughout the project.

“He spent a significant amount of time in the field, providing detailed safety and quality control observations, and escalating concerns when intervention beyond his level was required,” Wakefield said.

During the Phase 8 Family Housing project, Knegendorf volunteered to assist with a long-overdue request for equitable adjustment involving asbestos-containing material abatement.

“Drawing on his strong background in hazardous materials, he developed a solid technical analysis within just a few days. His ability to articulate the analysis with confidence was particularly impressive,” Wakefield said.

In addition to this, he contributed significantly to the resident management system by clearing submittal backlogs, resolving outstanding inspection items, and mentoring junior project engineers new to the system.

“Being deployed as a dedicated quality assurance representative for a large-scale military construction project came with its rewards and challenges,” Knegendorf said. “The rewarding part was the opportunity to teach and share knowledge, while the challenging side came from working within the structure of a military base—navigating multiple chains of command, roles, and disciplines to keep coordination on track.”

“It was a great opportunity to step outside my normal routine, take on new challenges, and still feel at home halfway across the world,” Knegendorf said.

Overall, the deployment to Japan for Fromuth and Knegendorf was a valuable experience—both professionally and personally, they both said. From supporting critical military construction projects to building strong working relationships across cultures, the assignment offered opportunities for growth, leadership and collaboration.

The infographic features a black background with a white geometric pattern on the left. It contains three rows of text and icons, each followed by a yellow rectangular block. The central text reads "REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY".

- STRANGERS ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT SECURITY (with a question mark icon)
- INDIVIDUALS WEARING TOO BIG OR UNSEASONABLE CLOTHES (with a jacket icon)
- PACKAGES OR VEHICLES LEFT BEHIND (with a box icon)

**REPORT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY**

# Student shadow provides an opportunity to teach and learn

*Story by Renwick Martin*

Engineers in the St. Paul District have a unique opportunity to teach the next generation of home-grown engineers. Ann Banitt, a senior hydraulic engineer in the St. Paul office, took advantage of this opportunity when she agreed to host Trevor Rother, a senior from a local high school.

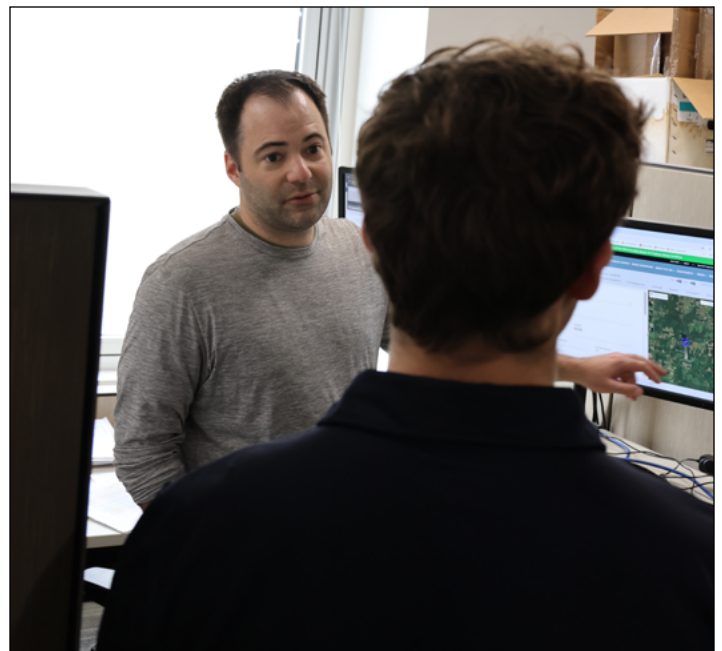


*Trevor Rother (right), a student at a local high school, shadows Ann Banitt (left), a hydraulic engineer, April 18. USACE St. Paul District photo by Ren Martin*

Required by his high school to job shadow a professional, Rother reached out to Banitt with an interest in engineering. Once the visit was approved, Banitt set an itinerary - one that would give Rother an overview of the various technical disciplines performed at the St. Paul District. He would get to experience how engineers coordinate, how various aspects of engineering work intersects and learn how the Corps of Engineers integrates chemistry, his future career aspiration, into their work.

In a whirlwind day, Rother went around the district office learning about hydrology, hydraulic engineering, structural engineering, dam safety and water management. Before wrapping up his job shadowing opportunity in a meeting with the Geographic Information System team, Rother was able to meet with Sarah Fischer, an environmental chemist in the Kansas City office, via video chat. Fischer later wrote that she was glad that she could support the efforts to “mentor the next generation of engineers and scientists.”

Rother said his biggest takeaway was seeing firsthand how people from different roles work together to accomplish a goal larger than the individual pieces. His favorite part of the day was Adam Howard’s presentation about the Fargo - Moorhead and Arcadia projects because Howard went in-depth and took his time explaining the projects and his role in them. “Howard’s presentation really put into perspective the important role of engineers in creating the blueprints for these massive projects we see in everyday life,” Rother said.



*Ryan Price (left) dam safety program manager, talks to Trevor Rother, a student at a local high school, April 18. USACE St. Paul District photo by Ren Martin*

# Zietz hunts in golden opportunity

*Story by Ren Martin*

Joel Zietz, a contracting officer representative in the Western Area field office in Fargo, North Dakota, couldn't believe his eyes when he found out he had won the lottery for one of the sought after "once-in-a-lifetime" North Dakota Moose hunting licenses. Having applied yearly since he was 16, Zietz was one of only 204 hunters, out of 25,257 applicants, that was awarded the rare opportunity to hunt one of North Dakota's heaviest animals.

Zietz was able to snag his coveted moose on the evening of the season opener, making a clean, one-shot harvest. After properly field dressing and processing the body with his wife, the moose hide was sent to a professional tannery, where the leather will be sewn into duffel bags and mittens. The meat, despite being shared with the western area field office in the form of a taco bar, will provide meals for Zietz and his family for many weeks to come.

For Zietz, harvests like this reflect his deep commitment to ethical hunting, a commitment that requires him to have the upmost precision on his shots. A properly aimed blow allows the hunter to maximize his use of the meat and hide as well as preventing the animal from suffering any additional distress.

That dedication to precision is what initially interested Zietz in long-range shooting. Years of practice culminated to him competing in the Nightforce Extreme Long-Range Steel Challenge rifle competition in Casper, Wyoming. With over 300 competitors from a variety of different countries and backgrounds, the event is seen as one of the premier long range shooting competitions in the United States.

The way the competition works is simple. That doesn't mean it's easy. The ultimate test of focus and skill, the competition requires participants to take into account the air temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and barometric pressure to hit the targets, which can be up to over 2,000 yards away. Participants are awarded two points for hitting the target on their first engagement, and one point for hitting it on their second.



*Joel Zietz, contracting officer representative, at the 2023 Nightforce Extreme Long-Range Steel Challenge in Casper, Wyoming. Courtesy photo*

**Story continued on Page 20**

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Zietz, who finished third in his division during the 2023 competition, attributed his success to his ability to focus. “I zoned out a lot of distractions and conversations. I spent lots of time watching wind changes and mirage behind my binoculars when I wasn’t shooting,” Zietz said, “the mental game is a huge factor.”

A key aspect of any shooting event is the rigorous safety rules. Before the competition begins, the competitors are run through a rigorous safety course. They are advised to begin each stage port arms, magazine in and bolt back. Muzzles are to remain pointed downrange, and rifles are not to be shot until the range officer tells them to engage. “Basic firearm safety means treating all firearms as if they are loaded,” Zietz said. “It’s important to go through the safety fundamentals, even with professional shooters.”

Born and raised in North Dakota, Joel Zietz has been with the St. Paul District for 15 years. After graduating from Minnesota State Community Technical College with an associate’s degree in construction management, he began an internship at Baldhill Dam in Ashtabula, North Dakota, where he eventually worked his way up to become the lead maintenance coordinator. He has been with the Western Area Office since 2024. “I greatly appreciate the encouraging supervisory team I have at the Fargo office,” Zietz said, “My colleagues are amazing people who bring great knowledge and experiences to the table to collaborate on projects, solve problems and ensure we keep the focus on safely completing all of our construction projects on time and within budget.”

Zietz lives on his 18-acre farmstead with his wife of 19 years and their three dogs. He is currently pursuing his bachelor’s degree in construction management after being selected by the Corps of Engineers as part of their academic degree training program. This fall he plans on hunting in the North Dakota Badlands after recently drawing another “once-in-a-lifetime” hunting license, this time for Elk.



*Joel Zietz, contracting officer representative, at the 2023 Nightforce Extreme Long-Range Steel Challenge in Casper, Wyoming. Courtesy photo*

# Recognizing our Employees of the Month: The MVPs of MVP



April  
**Gregory Hammons**  
Engineering and Construction



May  
**Chris Olson**  
Operations



June  
**Matt Simon**  
Engineering and Construction



# Summer Awards Ceremony



USACE St. Paul District photos by Liz Stoeckmann, Ren Martin and Shannon Bauer



# St. Paul District recognizes its employees



Jilliane Jaeger  
Office of Counsel  
Joseph W. Kimbel award for  
Professional Potential



John Carrell  
Office of Counsel  
Bert Pettinato and Barb Lollar  
Award for Pride in Public Service



Maj. Kyle Volk  
Engineering and Construction  
Construction Management  
Excellence Award



Dr. Leigh Youngblood  
Engineering and Construction  
Resilience Role Model Award



Adam Howard  
Engineering and Construction  
Mississippi Valley Division Outstanding  
Achievement Award and 2024 Hydrologic  
Professional of the Year Award



Abby Moore  
Engineering and Construction  
Mississippi Valley Division  
Climate Adaptation Annual  
Award



Lt. Chloe Foster  
Hurricane Helene Certificate of  
Appreciation



Helen Walz, Haley Djock, Geoff Kramer,  
Paul Fleming  
Hurricane Helene Civilian Service  
Achievement Medal



Marianna Aho and Patrick Moes  
Hurricane Helene Civilian Service  
Commendation Medal



# Length of Service Awards



## 10 years

- Kipp Baures, operations
- Ryan Danielson, operations
- Brady Dehnke, operations
- William Doerfler, readiness operations center
- Kacie Grupa, engineering and construction
- Ryan Huber, regulatory
- Ryan Markey, operations
- Mark Noack, operations
- Jennifer Obeso, internal review
- Logan Skoug, operations
- Eric Swanson, operations
- Ashley Woods, engineering and construction



10 years

## 15 years

- Matthew Bieniek, engineering and construction
- Kevin Denn, programs and project management
- Zachary Kimmel, programs and project management
- Chad Klein, operations
- Emily Moe, engineering and construction
- Katherine Opsahl, RPEDN
- Trevor Popkin, RPEDN
- Michelle Prosser, programs and project management
- Daniel Reburn, programs and project management
- Christine Riley, engineering and construction
- Andrea Sterling, RPEDN
- William Thomson, programs and project management



15 years

## 20 years

- Angelique Binner, operations
- Matthew Breza, operations
- Robert Brockway, operations
- Jason Hager, operations
- Jamie Mercer, operations
- William Odell, engineering and construction
- Kurt Schroeder, engineering and construction
- Chad Stellpflug, operations



20 years





# Length of Service Awards



## 25 years

Thomas Anderson, engineering and construction  
 David Bilderback, operations  
 Aaron Brown, operations  
 Thomas Fetting, operations  
 James Noren, engineering and construction  
 Bobbie Roundy, operations  
 Elliott Stefanik, RPEDN  
 Brian Turner, operations  
 Angela Wall, operations  
 Daryl Wierzbinski, regulatory



25 years

## 30 years

Jamie Borowiak, operations  
 John Carrell, office of counsel  
 Chad Caya, operations  
 Raymond Marinan, real estate  
 William Meier, operations  
 David Studenski, regulatory  
 Kurt Zacharias, operations



30 years

## 35 years

Brian Sipos, operations  
 Kevin Sommerland, real estate



35 years

## 40 years

Scott Hendrix, contracting

## 45 years

Kevin Berg, operations



# On the Mississippi River



On May 18, the Blackhawk Bridge over the Mississippi River at Lansing, Iowa, was closed to vehicle traffic due to a physical shift in one of the bridge's piers. Jake Reburn, an Iowa resident and Blackhawk Park employee, had to find an alternative mode of transportation for his morning commute. His choice: a 14-foot flat bottom boat. Reburn's new commuting method saved him about 40 minutes over the bridge detour.

When asked about the boating safety aspects of his commute, Reburn responded, "Well, we always take boating safety very seriously at Blackhawk and on the Mississippi River in general, so this is really just an extension of our normal safety stance. It's also nice to model good boating behavior to other boaters I encounter on the water and at the launch sites."



## Recreation and natural resources office move complete

Story by Shannon Bauer

After 46 years of maintaining an office in La Crescent, Minnesota, the St. Paul District relocated its recreation and natural resources office three miles across the river to Front Street in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

The move began at the beginning of the year and was substantially complete by late March. Dave Studenski, regulatory, said the new facility is an upgrade in that the office is no longer next door to a school, which will cut down on noise, and the building was new in 2008 with a modern heating and cooling system.

Home to members of the district's natural resource, navigation, real estate and regulatory staff, the new office is along the Mississippi River. "The view is pretty spectacular," said Jon Schultz, natural resources. "Right at the base of our building is the river, barges, eagles, birds, which is all part of what we do in our office."



# Around THE DISTRICT



*(left to right) Bruce Henry, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service forest ecologist, and Sara Rother and Andy Meier, USACE foresters, conduct a site visit in Pool 7 on the Upper Mississippi River, June 23. USACE St. Paul District courtesy photo*



*Mitch Serjogins (right), Lock and Dam 4 working supervisor, talks to a member of the public, July 12, at the Lock and Dam 6 open house in Trempealeau, Wisconsin. USACE St. Paul District photo by Liz Stoeckmann*



*Jinah Lockwood, program analyst, greets the public at the Lock and Dam 6 open house in Trempealeau, Wisconsin, July 12. USACE St. Paul District photo by Liz Stoeckmann*



*Natalie McGlinch, economist, answers questions at the Kinnickinnic public meeting, June 4, in River Falls, Wisconsin, USACE photo by Liz Stoeckmann*



*Aaron Pieplow and Angelo Pedettri, safety specialists, at the Lock and Dam 6 open house in Trempealeau, Wisconsin, July 12. USACE St. Paul District photo by Liz Stoeckmann*



*Corrine Hodapp (center), supervisory park ranger, at the Governor's fishing opener in Crosslake, Minnesota, May 10. USACE St. Paul District photo by Ren Martin*



## Promotions

**Michelle Butler**, administrative assistant, operations, St. Paul, Minnesota

**Aimee Eberle**, lock and dam operator, operations, Hastings, Minnesota

**David Francksen**, engineering technician, operations, Fountain City, Wisconsin

**Valeshka Mussenden Ferdinand**, civil engineer, engineering and construction, St. Paul, Minnesota

**Colin Nicklay**, natural resources specialist, operations, Federal Dam, Minnesota

**Daniel Reburn**, biologist, programs and project management, La Crosse, Wisconsin

**Jeremy Webb**, realty specialist, real estate, St. Paul, Minnesota

**Tom Yang**, realty specialist, real estate, St. Paul, Minnesota

**Joel Zietz**, construction control representative, engineering and construction, Fargo, North Dakota

## Retirements

**Roger Johnson** retired May 14 with 34 years of federal service. He served on the Dredge Goetz and at Lock and Dam 2.

## Congratulations

**Andrew Chambers**, regulatory, and his wife Wing, welcomed Sunisa Lee Chambers June 9, at 6 pounds 14 ounces and 19 inches long.



**Calvin Halverson**, engineering and construction, and his wife, Jess, welcomed Cooper Jeffery Halverson, May 31.



**Marianne Salas-Fuentes**, office of counsel, passed the Minnesota State Bar Exam and was sworn in as an attorney May 9.

# NEWS & Notes

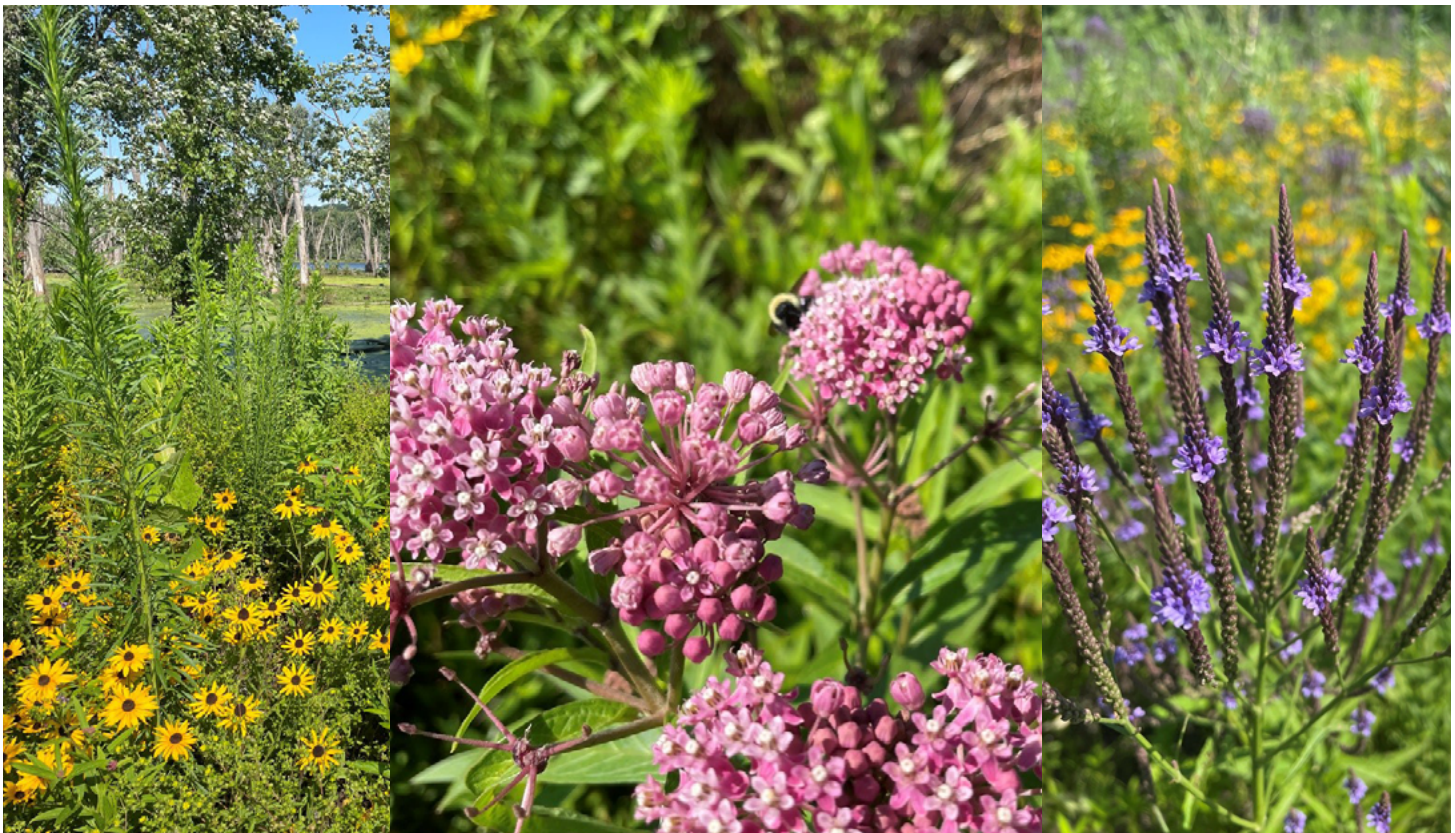


## Taps

Ross Metzger passed away June 7. Metzger worked with the Corps of Engineers as a mechanical engineer. Metzger joined the Corps when he retired from the private sector in the late 1980s and continued with the Corps in design branch through the 1990s, where he was the deputy chief of the design branch.



Ferris Chamberlain passed away June 5. Chamberlain worked for the Corps for many years. He worked as a modeler prior to becoming the regulator of the Western Area reservoirs. In 2008, he became the Water Management and Hydrology Section Chief, retiring in 2017.



*Flowers and pollinators at McGregor Lake habitat rehabilitation and enhancement project, near McGregor, Iowa. USACE St. Paul District photos by Andy Meier*

# Wear Your Life Jacket at Work Day

MAY 16



#WearIt