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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers opening second Recovery Act-funded Veterans Curation Project laboratory in St. Louis

ST. LOUIS (January 15, 2010) – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will open the second Veterans Curation Project laboratory, funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, in St. Louis, Mo., on Friday, January 22.

The St. Louis site, in the Robert A. Young Building in downtown St. Louis, is the second of three Veterans Curation Project laboratories that the Corps will open with \$3.5 million in funding from the \$4.6 billion appropriated for the Army's Civil Works program in the Recovery Act. The first site was opened October 16, in Augusta, Ga. Another will be opened in Washington, DC, on January 25.

The three sites were selected because they are home to relatively large populations of wounded and returning veterans.

"The three Veterans Curation Project laboratories funded by the Recovery Act are unique opportunities for the nation's Armed Forces and the Corps of Engineers," the Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works told an assembled audience at the Augusta opening in October.

"The labs are an innovative approach to supporting returning veterans of all services with jobs and training in a variety of technical skills," according to Darcy. "At the same time, the labs will advance the curation of archeological and historic properties that have come into the Corps' possession over the years as a result of construction at its water project sites around the country."

In 1995, the Corps created the Center of Expertise for Curation and Management of Archeological Collections in its St. Louis District to provide protocols and best management practices for maintaining heritage assets. The Corps has extensive archaeological collections and has not been able to fully keep up with proper curation requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act.

The St. Louis District's Center of Expertise designed and is managing implementation of the Veterans Curation Project at all three centers. The Corps has hired Brockington and Associates of Atlanta, Ga., to establish and manage the project's three laboratories.

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Corps specialists and the contractor are working closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs and non-governmental Wounded Warrior groups to fill jobs at the laboratories with veterans and disabled veterans. Jobs are being tailored and rotated to fit the medical needs of those disabled veterans who are unable to work a full day and to offer on-the-job training and work to more veterans. Approximately ten veterans from conflicts spanning from Vietnam to the current contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are being employed and trained at the centers at any given time.

Veterans working at the three labs are being trained in computer, photographic and scanning technologies that are being applied to rehabilitating Corps archeological collections and their associated records. The technical skills learned at the labs will be transferrable to potential future jobs outside the labs. Jobs that employ these skills are growing segments of the record keeping and document archiving requirements of industries such as medical, financial and legal fields.

“No group of people has done more to forge our national identity throughout history than the veterans who have served and sacrificed for the nation,” added Darcy at the Augusta opening. “It is our privilege to now be able to give disabled veterans an opportunity to continue shaping the nation through the work and training they will do at this important new facility.”

St. Louis District Commander, Col. Thomas E. O'Hara will be the principle speaker at the St. Louis opening ceremony. The ceremony is scheduled at 10 a.m. in the Second Floor auditorium of the Robert A. Young Federal Building at 1222 Spruce St., in downtown St. Louis. Tours of the laboratory facility will be conducted after its conclusion.

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Editors Note: A media availability will be conducted before the opening ceremony from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. to enable media to tour the facility and to talk to employed veterans and Corps personnel in a less congested environment. Please notify the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District Public Affairs Office (314-331-8002 or 8068) if you intend to attend during that time so we may facilitate your passage through building security.