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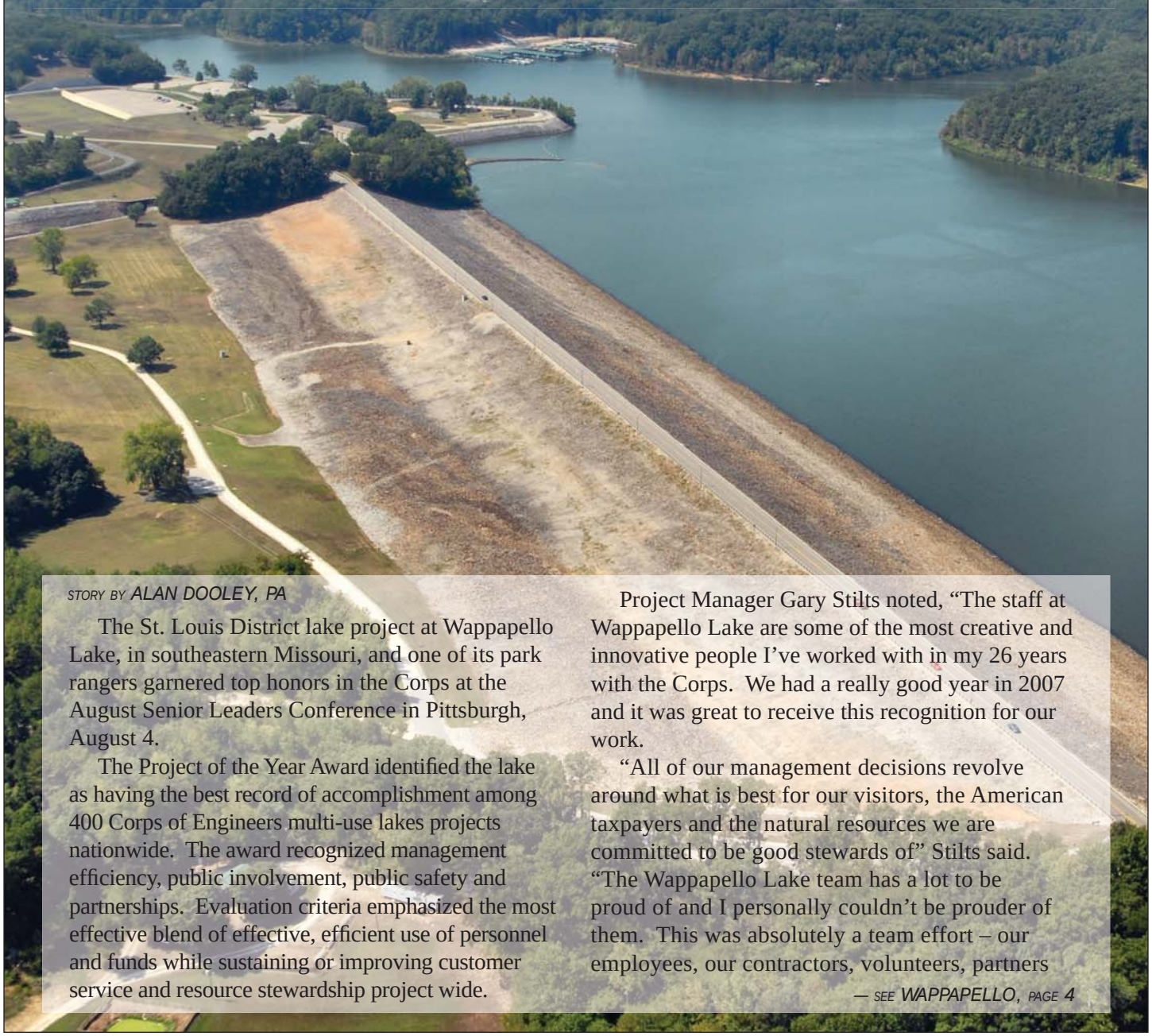
District Lake and Ranger are tops in Corps



STORY BY *ALAN DOOLEY, PA*

The St. Louis District lake project at Wappapello Lake, in southeastern Missouri, and one of its park rangers garnered top honors in the Corps at the August Senior Leaders Conference in Pittsburgh, August 4.

The Project of the Year Award identified the lake as having the best record of accomplishment among 400 Corps of Engineers multi-use lakes projects nationwide. The award recognized management efficiency, public involvement, public safety and partnerships. Evaluation criteria emphasized the most effective blend of effective, efficient use of personnel and funds while sustaining or improving customer service and resource stewardship project wide.

Project Manager Gary Stilts noted, "The staff at Wappapello Lake are some of the most creative and innovative people I've worked with in my 26 years with the Corps. We had a really good year in 2007 and it was great to receive this recognition for our work.

"All of our management decisions revolve around what is best for our visitors, the American taxpayers and the natural resources we are committed to be good stewards of" Stilts said. "The Wappapello Lake team has a lot to be proud of and I personally couldn't be prouder of them. This was absolutely a team effort – our employees, our contractors, volunteers, partners

— SEE *WAPPAPELLO*, PAGE 4

From the Corner Office

Col. Thomas E. O'Hara, Jr

Welcome to this issue of Esprit. I want to use this opportunity to discuss two subjects – giving and staying safe. Both should be permanent features of our lives.

Giving our wealth

Recently we kicked off the 2008 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) in the RAY Building. Two people spoke to us. They gave the CFC faces and told their stories. They told how the CFC is not just a huge impersonal charity, but rather is an opportunity for each of us to make a difference in other's lives.

I know times are tough. Between falling investment values and rising fuel costs, there is much unease. But this is a time when each dollar we can give is that much more important.

In brief remarks, I challenged divisions and offices to compete for CFC success on a per capita basis. But most of all, I challenged each of us to look into our hearts to decide how much we can each share with those who have less than we do. We have the luxury of payroll deductions that, in small relatively painless increments every two weeks, can make huge differences.

Giving of our selves

Another way that you can make a huge difference is by giving of your time and expertise by volunteering to support either of our District's priority missions - support for New Orleans or supporting the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

Many of you are aware that the District has recently taken on a greater role completing the Hurricane Protection System in New Orleans. We need to have all of these repairs and upgrades completed by 2011. An article in the next issue of Esprit will focus on this mission. If you are interested in being part of this effort, please notify your supervisor.

In addition to New Orleans recovery, MVD also has a primary responsibility for manning the Gulf Region North (GRN) District in Iraq. With the other five Districts in the valley, we are charged with forming the team that is continuing to rebuild the northern region of Iraq.

The St. Louis District has a proud tradition of service to our Army and our nation in Iraq. Over the past few years many of you have deployed. Some are deployed now. Some have deployed more than once.

The Global War on Terrorism is a long conflict that requires continued vigilance and support. This is not a traditional military enemy. We do have the threat of a philosophy that firmly opposes our way of life.

In addition to prevailing militarily and securing our own safety and interests, we are striving to bring peace and opportunities to people who have known little but conflict and trouble for decades. Their homelands have been fertile grounds for the dissent and conflict that has fostered terrorism. I firmly believe the work the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers does in the Gulf and elsewhere around the globe has the most promise of providing this peace for us all.

I urge you to consider serving in the GRN as providing multiple opportunities. It's an opportunity to serve. It's an opportunity to grow personally. It's an opportunity to

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St. Louis District

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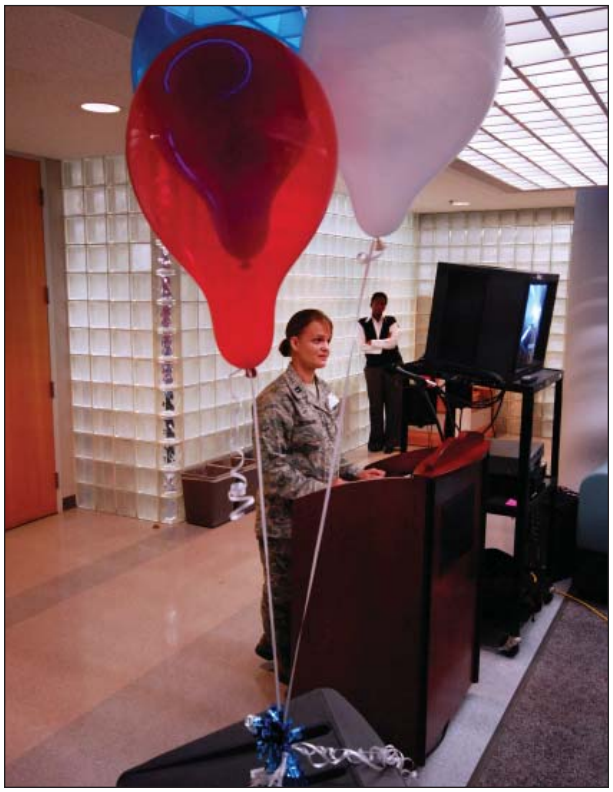
2008 CFC Kick Off



The St. Louis District kicked off the 2008 Combined Federal Campaign in grand fashion on Thursday, October 9 with a rally that included two first-hand stories of how the campaign has helped, and is helping, locally.

First, Susan Kelter, of the Lift for Life Academy & Life for Life Gym in downtown St. Louis told how contributions are supporting a club that combines weight lifting and other after school activities with academic opportunities for St. Louis city youth.

Air Mobility Command's Capt. Kerri Rochman followed and told of her family's tragedy in-progress with a daughter suffering from Tay-Sachs Disease.

Col. O'Hara challenged divisions and branches to compete on a per capita basis and CFC Coordinator, Tan Gates announced weekly drawings for those who have turned in their contribution sheets.

Air Mobility Command's Capt. Kerri Rochman delivered a moving speech of how CFC contributions are helping her and her family deal with their daughter's illness.

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

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make a difference in a troubled world.

Talk with your fellow employees who have deployed in support of the GWOT. They will surely acknowledge that there are financial compensations for the hardship and hard work. But of most of all, they will tell of memories of adventure and life changing experiences to treasure forever. Ask them.

You can make a difference. In the GRN we are building schools and courts. We are building clinics where health care is available for the first time in memory. We are building roads so citizens can go to market. We are building security, making lights go on and delivering clean, safe water.

I hear and see time and time again, how the men and women of the St. Louis District have made a difference in the GWOT. We can do so because we in the MVD share a common vision, goals and processes. MVS' and MVD's support for the GRN is an extension of that team philosophy.

Please, check with Kathy Tober to see what kinds of skills are needed, see if you can match those needs and then answer the call. There is no greater mission upon us today.

Personal Safety

Finally, I want to remind everyone of safety. It should be a focus in all we do. Fall is a time of change. We may be bringing out chain saws, putting up ladders to clean gutters and this year, we may be pressed by those overdue projects we didn't get done this summer because it rained so much.

Power tools, ladders and so forth can be fraught with potential danger any time of the year, especially if we are performing other than routine activities.

Check out instruction manuals. Check safety provisions. Before you pull the starter cord or put your first foot on a ladder rung, look one more time for risks, assess them and respond to them.

Risks and danger don't take days off, so neither can your safety vigilance.

Give of your wealth. Give of your expertise and passion. Stay safe so you can do both. Your loved ones, friends and colleagues are counting on you. They and the Corps need you.

Essayons.
Col. Thomas E. O'Hara, Jr.

WAPPAPELLO, FROM COVER

and even the public who visit the lake."

Another proud moment in announcing the awards in Pittsburgh came when Wappapello Lake park ranger Andrew Jefferson was recognized for Interpretive Excellence with the Corps of Engineers Hiram M. Chittendon Award for his individual work.

Jefferson told how honored he felt to receive the award, especially with his wife LouRetta looking on.

Accomplishments for which Jefferson was recognized included special events – on and off site, a highly visible and successful public safety program and operations at the lake's visitors' center he is in charge of.

Andrew Jefferson with local professional artist Wayne Freer near Wappapello.
photo courtesy of Wappapello Lake

Jefferson noted that he had been reluctant to be considered for the award again. "I was nominated twice before," he said. "I thought this would never happen to me," he added. "I was beginning to think I might be the 'Susan Lucci' of park rangers," he laughed: "nominated often and never selected."

"But it was truly awesome to be recognized, especially in the presence of my peers and with my wife," he beamed. "Then the lake was recognized as the Project of the Year. I don't know if any project has ever before gained both of these awards at once," he noted.

The award for excellent stewardship of scarce resources is more than a plaque to hang on the wall, project manager Gary Stilts noted. "As part of the award we have received $25,000 to use for an unfunded item. That money is going to be used to build a picnic shelter at the Redman Creek Beach Area. It was a team effort to get the award and everyone is going to gain from it," he concluded.

Left and below, two examples of the public safety program, which was spear-headed by Jefferson.
photos courtesy of Wappapello Lake

Building Strong for America

Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh
Commander, Mississippi Valley Division

I've been talking recently with many people about building a vision for the future of the Mississippi watershed, or what I like to refer to as America's Great River. I spoke at seven public meetings in August during the Mississippi River Commission Low Water Inspection Trip.

I told the 500 people who attended the meetings that oftentimes we must gather the insights and lessons from the past to build a better future. I have been reading all the history books that numerous stakeholders recommended to me in April during the Commission's High Water Inspection Trip. As a result of reading those books, I realized we must learn from the past so we can lay the foundation for a new book – a book that will be written by our descendents. The book will be a history of how we, (their ancestors) created a powerful Vision for America's Great River. It is now up to us to start creating the book's first chapter.

This summer, I really surprised our stakeholders when I asked them to help us create the 200-year vision. The looks I got back were filled with wonder, as in, "I wonder what the heck he's talking about."

I continued to ask the stakeholders how they would start to write the 200 year vision, and I found that everyone has an interest in some aspect of the river's bounty. Navigation organizations are interested in improving navigation. Flood control groups are interested in improving flood risk reduction. Environmental groups want cleaner water and more sustainable ecosystems. Scientists want to improve their understanding of how rivers thrive, and the folks in Louisiana want to use sediment to rebuild the coastline. The list of good ideas is quite impressive, and we've started gathering the suggestions to build a sustainable vision for the Nation's greatest watershed. Our goal is to look at the entire watershed from a planning perspective and maximize the economic and environmental value of our water resources in a sustainable way.

To truly achieve sustainable development, we've got to use integrated, comprehensive systems-based approaches that include risk-based methods and tools. We must also be cautious and avoid the "Curse of Knowledge." The "Curse of Knowledge" is the burden of already knowing the information you are trying to share with others. Because you already know the information, you cannot put yourself in the shoes of people who are learning the information for the first time. You lack the innocence of "not knowing." Therefore, you cannot communicate through their perspective, and consequently, cannot reach them where they are now. I urge all of you to start looking for ways we can reach people from their "not knowing" viewpoint and begin creating the 200 year vision for America's Greatest River.

Switching topics now to building trust, I believe our successful Hurricane Gustav response will help us regain some of the trust we lost in the aftermath of Katrina. As the Chief said in a recent blog, "Deeds, not words." Regaining more trust will come through the quality of the work we, and our many partners, will do to protect the city from future storms.

Indeed, we are rapidly building a stronger hurricane risk reduction system in New Orleans,

— see *BUILDING STRONG*, page 7

Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh (center) at the Low Water Inspection Hearing at Melvin Price Locks and Dam on August 15, 2008.

USACE photo by George Stringham

"R-R-A-T" spells "Cooperation"

STORY BY *ALAN DOOLEY, PA*

Each summer, a group called the River Resources Action Team (RRAT) meets quietly on the Mississippi River in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District's stretch of the river.

This year the group met on September 9 and 10, while moving down river from the northernmost extent of the District, just below Lock and Dam 22 at Saverton, Mo. They finished their trip at the Corps's Service Base in St. Louis. Next year they will start in St. Louis and travel down to the end of St. Louis' area of responsibility, almost 200 miles away, at the confluence with the Ohio River.

Then they will return to the northern half of the District a third year. And so on.

During the journey, some 50 representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, other federal agencies, state agencies from both sides of the Mississippi River and non-governmental organizations like The Nature Conservancy and the American Land Conservancy, and the occasional news reporter, focused their attention on the state of the Mississippi River and its future.

This year, as in many recent years, the journey was made via Barge 53, a flat barge with a weather cover at one end, pushed by a Corps of Engineers tow boat.

"It wasn't always an endeavor this size," said Claude Strauser, a retired river engineer who made the trip again this year. "The first time we did this was in June of 1972. It involved about six people who went out onto the river to view results of our first attempt to modify traditional river engineering structures to accommodate environmental goals. We went to see how a series of dikes that were notched to create islands were performing," Strauser remembered.

During breaks between formal presentations, ad hoc groups form on the St. Louis District's Barge 53 during the 2008 RRAT barge trip. So-called break out sessions enable individuals to hash out details of programs and projects in which they are directly involved or have interests in.

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

On that occasion, someone commented that it was valuable to get out of the office to be able to focus on the river. On the return trip the discussion drifted to how this might be a good thing to do again.

And thus was born what was then termed the "Annual Mississippi River Coordination Trip." But that name didn't really lend itself to a catchy, easily remembered acronym and eventually the RRAT emerged.

During the trip there's a lively interchange and exchange of information between many agencies and groups that previously at best ignored each other or at extremes, opposed each other.

"In the early years we did a lot of scowling at each other, but that takes more muscles than smiling and finally we gradually broke down and agreed to see if we had any goals in common," retired Corps veteran Strauser related.

"Today, while we may not start everything together, we are all honestly determined to seek 'and' answers to challenges," Strauser said.

"We want to identify ideas that will make navigation safer and more efficient… and avoid causing problems for water users… and provide environmental benefits," Strauser said.

"We definitely don't want to find 'or' answers. If we define an answer that will do one thing 'or' another, by definition we are picking a winner and appointing a loser," he noted.

In the course of RRAT trips, discussion topics range across a

— SEE *COOPERATION*, PAGE 10

BUILDING STRONG, FROM PAGE 5

and our Gulf Coast recovery work is the Nation's #1 domestic priority. It's always important to remember and communicate that we are reducing risk, not "guaranteeing safety." Everyone must know there is no way to eliminate risk altogether.

Our Congressionally mandated goal is to provide the 100-yr level of hurricane storm damage risk reduction in 2011. The Administration and Congress are committed to that goal and have appropriated $12.85 billion, with over $4 billion committed and approximately $2 billion in expenditures to date. We've repaired or replaced 220 miles of levees and floodwalls, and we've made other additions to strengthen and improve the system. As you could see during the numerous television reports, the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal flood wall withstood Gustav's fury. Our work made a difference and helped to prevent further destruction to a great American city.

Now here's the really encouraging news from New Orleans. More than 900 people showed up for a recent job fair hosted by the New Orleans District. The job seekers showed up in business dress, with resumes in hand, wanting to work for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. If it can happen in New Orleans, it can happen all over the Corps. And that brings me to my final topic - building a stronger bench.

You already know the Chief of Engineers is urging every Corps employee to make a shift in thinking, from "good" to "GREAT." We've also got the Chief's challenge to shift our thoughts, words and actions to elevate and expand our thinking and performance. I know that I'm working on elevating my thinking regarding the creation of a vision for the Mighty Mississippi watershed, and I hope you will join me in that effort.

U.S. Representative Jerry Costello speaks with Lt. Gen. Robert Van Antwerp, Chief of Engineers, and Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh (center), following a press conference at Mid-America Airport in Mascoutah, Ill. on June 23, 2008.

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

Also, that shift in thinking should inspire all of us to create an even stronger organization by encouraging the best possible people – people willing to work tirelessly for the betterment of our Nation and our world – to come work for the Corps. If you've seen your Outlook inbox lately, you know that many good and experienced folks are retiring. We are fortunate that many qualified people are ready to move up from within the organization, but we must also go outside the Corps to find that great talent out there that can help us with our huge workload that I don't foresee getting smaller anytime soon.

One of the best ways we can bring the best people to the Corps is to share our compelling vision for the future with them, thus granting them the power to help create lasting change. These are exciting times and we can offer a wonderful career to America's best talent.

Our remaining charge is clear – get this GREAT Mississippi Valley Team of disciplined people moving forward with disciplined thought and action to solve the Region's water resources and engineering challenges. Together, we will continue to add value to our Nation by Building Strong!

Essayons!
Brig. Gen. Michael J. Walsh

Congratulations to MVS's USACE W

Best in Show and 1st Pl

Charlie Deutsch, R

Honorable Mention: Flora and Fauna

Stephanie Koch, Kaskaskia Lock & Dam

Honorable Mention: USACE Employees in Action

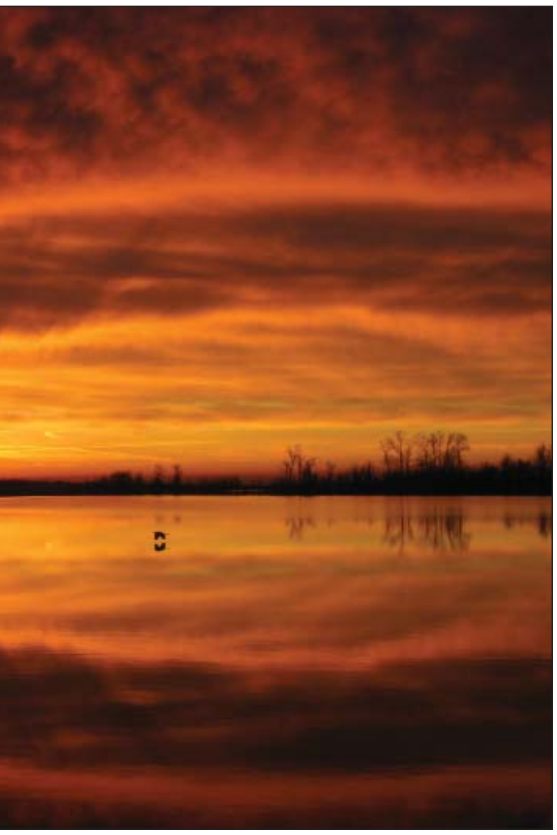
Nicole Dalrymple, Public Affairs Office

Congratulations to our MVS winners! This is from one district and some absolutely amazin of show, two 1st places, and three honorable Photo Contest.

All winners will be presented with plaques at t Safety Summit in Panama City, Fla., on Apr. 1 mitted entries!

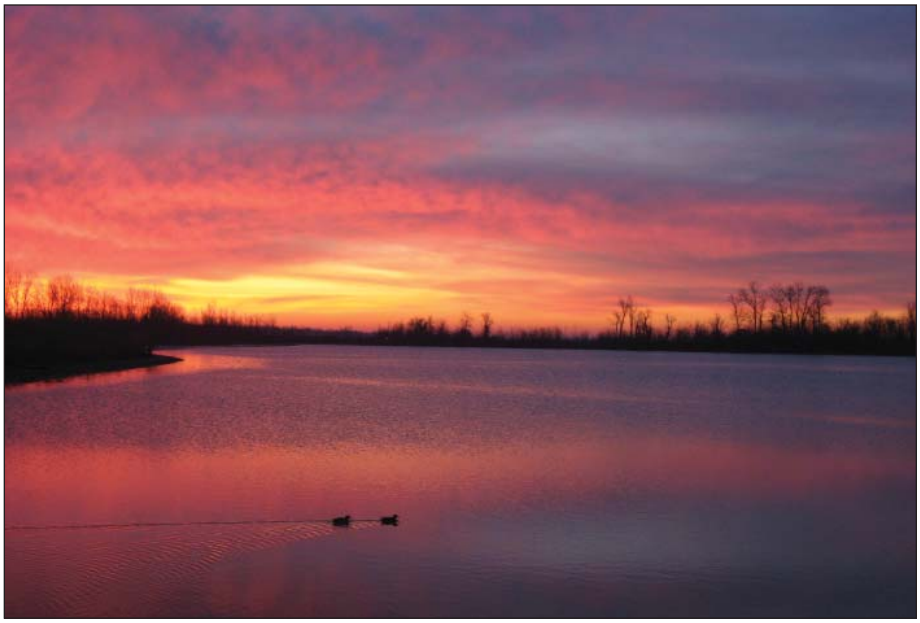
Water Safety Photo Contest Winners

ace: Scenic Water Scenes
ivers Project Office



1st Place: Commercial Boating
Stephanie Koch, Kaskaskia Lock & Dam

Honorable Mention: Scenic Water Scenes
Charlie Deutsch, Rivers Project Office



the most winners we've seen in this contest
g photos. The St. Louis District won best
mentions in the 2008 USACE Water Safety

the next International Boating & Water
9-22, 2009. Thanks to all those who sub-

Rachel Garren
Natural Resource Specialist

COOPERATION, FROM PAGE 6

broad gamut of concerns. This year for example, they included, to mention a few: proposed fish passages at Locks and Dams 22 and Mel Price; an update on the Navigation Ecosystem Sustainability Program; dredge material placement; a discussion of the Mississippi River Water Trail; and the status of levee repairs following the floods of 2008. There was not just something for everyone, but rather a lot of things for a lot of people.

The agenda – distributed in advance – allows for instant interjection of passing sights.

"There! Those are Asian Carp. There's a whole school of them."

"If you look to the right, that's where the levee at Winfield, Mo., was overtopped and breached this summer," another person announced as the barge passed.

Brian Johnson, who headed this year's program for the St. Louis District told of the many unforeseen benefits of such gatherings.

"It is amazing to bring people together who may be held apart by geographic boundaries, or because agencies may not have had a history of working with each other, or simply because they never thought of each other. The sense of partnership that arises is really remarkable," Johnson said.

"A lot of times we suddenly realize that we have common or complementary interests. One group may want to get rid of water while a neighboring interest desperately wants water. You see it now in our PL-84-99 levee repair work. We are working hard to repair the damaged levees but also striving to find ways to improve the environment at the same time," he noted.

Johnson, who serves as the Ecosystem Restoration Business Line Manager for the St. Louis District Army Corps office, says he never ceases to be amazed what people can achieve if they simply sit down and don't concern themselves with who gets credit or who's name will be attached to a project.

Business Line Managers are a relatively new entity in the Corps of Engineers. They seek to bridge across areas of interest, such as planning, engineering, environmental, contracting and resource management to make things happen.

"You have to be willing to be truly collaborative and understand that success comes from getting projects on the ground that improve habitat and improve the environment. No single agency or individual can make it happen alone," Johnson said. He said this with the assuredness of recent success, having just completed work with over 20 agencies on a watershed planning study aimed at improving the Middle Mississippi River.

Only weeks ago he briefed the relatively new program to the Assistant Under-Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. "He was enthusiastic and encouraged us to continue to reach out to stakeholders and partners," Johnson said with a smile.

A key element of success of the RRAT trip seems to be a willingness to give anyone the floor to present their ideas. Questions are asked in an unfettered environment as well. Nobody seeks gain over other participants.

And this message of cooperation and its benefits is spreading.

Craig Uyeda from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission was onboard for this year's trip. "We have held cooperative meetings of this type in Arkansas, but this takes it to a whole new level. I'm going to try to try to take some of these ideas back and see if we can form a group like this."

— *SEE COOPERATION, NEXT PAGE*

Leonard Hopkins, St. Louis District's Chief Hydrologic and Hydraulics Branch, and Brian Johnson hold a chart of a section of the Mississippi River near Cape Girardeau, Mo., as Missouri Department of Conservation's Dave Ostendorf (R), discusses fishery sampling in that region.

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

COOPERATION, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Art Lippoldt, a member of The American Land Conservancy's (ALC) Board of Directors (L) listens as the ALC's Mississippi River Program Director Jenny Frazier and Craig Uyeda from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission engage in an animated conversation on day 2 of the St. Louis District's RRAT barge trip on the Mississippi River on Sept. 10, 2008.

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

Another representative told how important it is to openly share plans and proposed solutions, such as was being done on the trip. He admitted that failure to do so had subjected his agency to criticism and court intervention at several junctures in recent years.

Another key to the success of the RRAT trips seems to be their somewhat primitive nature. The participants are largely exposed to the weather, for example.

The forward part of the barge is covered with an open shelter – sort of like a car port. The RRAT trip normally takes place in July, and the cover provides relief from the sun. But this year the Mississippi River was flooding at that time, and the event was pushed back into September.

"Tuesday morning when we got to the barge from an overnight motel stay, it was 48 degrees," Ron Dieckman, a St. Louis Hydraulic Engineers said. "So we took a few minutes to haul all of the chairs and tables onto the exposed deck where we were warmed a little by the sun."

St. Louis District River Engineer Leonard Hopkins said, "One year we borrowed the enclosed barge from the Vicksburg District. It was fully enclosed, with wonderful panoramic windows. It was air conditioned and has flush toilets. But when we were finished, everyone said they hated it. They told how they felt cut off from the river, its sounds, its smells, the wind. So we've been outside ever since."

The environment is changing. In the early days people were cut off once they pulled away from the shore. But today cell phones and Blackberries have several people wandering away to make calls or reply to emails. But the serenity of the journey, whose pace is dictated largely by what they see and what they want to discuss "shames" most back to the discussion or discussions that form and reform during carefully interjected breaks.

"You have to plan carefully," trip coordinator Dawn Lamm, from the Corps St. Louis District said. "There are meals, overnight accommodations, pick ups and drop offs to be arranged, lunches on the river and a steady stream of snacks and beverages to be planned and provided," she added.

But in the end, the ability of the barge to be slowed to discuss a specific site or to hurry on down the river – as is decided at the moment – or to take a short side trip up the Illinois River because they are ahead of schedule, is what makes the event move forward without it being made to feel "pushed."

Every RRAT trip ends the same way – with what the Army calls a hot wash after action review. "What went right? What went wrong? What can we do better?" Brian Johnson asked. "Next year we will go from St. Louis to the Ohio River," he reminded the group. "If you have any ideas how to make the trip better we would love to hear them".

As RRAT 2008 participants reached St. Louis, some helped each other up the 40 or so steps from the river bank with heavy luggage. Many had made the RRAT trip with each other several times before. Some had done so for years. For some though, it was their first trip.

But for all, RRAT spelled "cooperation," and they had become a talkative, sharing, collegial family. Hand shakes, hugs and looks back to the river are final gestures for the year.

Most will be back when Barge 53 gets underway next year from St. Louis. The Mississippi River is at the same time, ever changing and changeless. For two days they were part of it and the feeling hangs on for a long time afterward.

So do the results.

Rivers Project receives award from the American Recreation Coalition

STORY BY NICOLE DALRYMPLE, PA

This summer the American Recreation Coalition (ARC) presented one of six 2008 Beacon Awards to the Rivers Project Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District. The coalition created the Beacon Award in 2005 to recognize leadership and innovation in utilizing technology to enhance visitor services and recreation management on public lands and waters.

The Rivers Project Office staff based in West Alton, Mo. was lauded for efforts to establish a water trail on the Mississippi River using the latest technologies of GIS, GPS, computer modeling and the World Wide Web to connect the recreating public to the natural resources of the mighty Mississippi.

"Rivers Project is committed to providing outdoor recreational opportunities that connect people to the river and their natural communities and promoting healthy lifestyles," explained Kim Rea, Rivers Project Office's interpretive services team leader.

"We want to get people outdoors," she added. "By promoting sports such as hiking, biking and paddling and by using tools of technology and science such as segways and GPS receivers, we hope to raise the bar and demonstrate the Corps' Natural Resource Management program's capabilities. We are always looking for innovative ways to broaden our services while staying true to our mission and outreach goals and objectives."

The Beacon Award recognized the innovative efforts of Rivers Project Office in establishing the Pike's Passage portion of the newly-forming Mississippi River Water Trail. This riverine version of a hiking trail, dedicated May 19, 2007, provides designated day use and primitive camping areas along a 27.8 mile portion of the river from Lock and Dam 22 in Saverton, Mo., to Lock and Dam 24 in Clarksville, Mo.

A second portion of the trail, known as Pinnacle Pass, was dedicated in May 2008. Pinnacle Pass is also 27.8 miles long and runs from Lock and Dam 24 in Clarksville to Lock and Dam 25 in Winfield, Mo. Work continues on new portions of the trail, with plans to dedicate another 59 miles of river trail May 2009.

The plan for the trail was to start at the top of the District boundary and work south, explained Rea. The ultimate goal is not just a 300-mile-long water trail along the river in the St. Louis District but to have a trail that runs the length of the Mississippi River, through all six districts of the Mississippi Valley Division, from the river's headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.

The St. Louis District plans to engage all districts along the river to accomplish the goal of a headwaters-to-gulf Mississippi River Water Trail. In fact meetings have already occurred between St. Louis District staff and counterparts in the Rock Island District.

At the Pike's Passage dedication representatives from the American Canoe Association described the Mississippi River as a beautiful venue and natural resource, and noted that water trail participation is at its height with more than 32 million paddlers nationwide, including coastal and sea kayaking.

Rea said the Rivers Project

— SEE BEACON, NEXT PAGE

Katy Manar, a biologist with the Corps' Rivers Project Office in West Alton, Mo., discusses the benefits and features of the new water trail. The Pike's Passage portion of the Mississippi River water trail was dedicated May 19, 2007.

USACE photo by Nicole Dalrymple

BEACON, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Features of the new water trail include designated day use and primitive camping areas. The primitive campsites include fire rings, a cleared sleeping area, and rules and regulations.

USACE photos by Nicole Dalrymple

Office has noted a surge in paddling recreation, including both canoes and kayaks, and they are receiving positive feedback on the trail portions open to the public.

The water trail encourages low-impact use of public lands and promotes stewardship of the natural resources. The trail also promotes the Mississippi River in a safe and environmentally friendly way by educating the public on "leave no trace" concepts and promoting safety on the river, Rea added.

Technology played a key role in the trails development when it was realized early on that the public did not have the knowledge and access to maps and technology that would guide their travels to many of the islands and riparian lands available for their enjoyment.

The water trail initiative was able to close that gap by using the latest mapping and GPS technology combined with strong partnerships to link the public to the river and showcase it as a paddling destination.

Sarah Miller, a biologist at Rivers Project, provided the mapping and GPS/GIS work, creating an innovative full color map and informational brochure. The data and map allows the public to easily navigate to the access points, day use areas and primitive campsite locations. Natural areas, vegetation classification, route information, access points and river gage station information are all included on the maps. Eventually all of this data will be accessible on a user-friendly water trail website.

Rea praised Miller's efforts, explaining that she accomplished all the work without any formal training and did an exemplary job moving the project forward. "She worked right along side me from day one," Rea said, "and there would be no water trail without her outstanding work and dedication to the project."

The day use and primitive camping areas are all low maintenance sites with no infrastructure. Fire containment rings are the only structures maintained at the primitive campsites. Sites are designated along the shoreline and on islands by recreational signage, which also contains rules and regulations of the site.

A group of local paddlers, who originally approached the Corps to develop a water trail, have established a cooperating association in conjunction with the American Canoe Association and The St. Louis Canoe and Kayak Club.

Jeff Greenstreet, co-chair of the Mississippi Water Trail Association, voiced his appreciation for the "tireless effort" of the Army Corps and the St. Louis Kayak Club. He said that Pike's Passage represents "a significant effort" and the association is committed to making the trail a success. The association will assist in operating and maintaining the trail, doing many of the individual site checks.

The Beacon Award citation for Pike's Passage recognized the trail as being "a vanguard for future recreational advances and is worthy of the accolades of being a true 'Beacon'." Pike's Passage is being viewed as a model for future recreation innovation and advances, according to the American Recreation Coalition.

Kim Rea and Sarah Miller accepted the Beacon Award on behalf of Rivers Project Office at the June 9 awards ceremony at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. ARC Vice Chairman Richard Coon presented the award.

For more information about the Rivers Project Office visit http://www.mvs.usace.army.mil/Rivers/

For more information about the American Recreation Coalition visit http://www.funoutdoors.com

(Some information in this article was taken from Rivers Project Office's nomination package for the Beacon Award.)

In Support of the Global War on Terrorism: *Postcards from the Front: Danielle Billings*

Editor's note: The message below is from Danielle Billings who is currently assigned as a Project Manager at Gulf Region Division's Southern District Office.

I began working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a Program Analyst in the St. Louis District in 2005, after graduating with a degree in International Business. I worked as a Student Cooperative Educational Program Employee (SCEP) in a Support for Others Program Analyst role, and later a Civil Works Program Analyst, while working towards an MBA in Finance. In 2007, I took on an additional duty as the Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) Regional P2 Coordinator before deciding in July that I was ready for something different.

I had spoken with a co-worker who had deployed to the Gulf Region North District and the former Deputy Commander in St. Louis who had deployed to the Gulf Region South District before deciding that Iraq didn't sound so bad. With my MBA program completed and the positive feedback I received, I decided to take the plunge. I expected the tour to be challenging - with the work schedule, environment, and a new group of people - but it turned out that this experience has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.

I have been in Iraq for a year now and have made some close friends while deployed. I have also learned about Iraqi culture and have a new appreciation for the Iraqi people. Our mission is crucial to allowing Iraqis to stand on their own and I wish that more people would volunteer to support this effort. Deploying to support GWOT may not sound like it's a lot of fun but I can honestly say that I am happy that I made this decision. For anyone who is considering whether or not to come to Iraq, I would highly recommend it and cannot say enough about all of the wonderful things my tour to Iraq has brought. Coming over here has helped me grow both personally and professionally and I would not trade this experience for the world.

I would like to thank my family and friends who have been there to support me and the co-workers with whom I have had the opportunity to serve. It isn't always easy to be away from home but it most certainly has been enjoyable!

(Top) Billings outside Gulf Region South's District Headquarters building at Tallil Air Base. She expects to return to the St. Louis District in February 2009. (Left) At one of Billings projects, the site superintendent for Al Teek Company, an Iraqi construction firm, briefs CDR Terry Hart about the current status of ongoing work including the new 300-meter by 600-meter perimeter fence being built at the new Al Maymona Location Command compound.

Congratulations to the 2008 LDP Graduates

Leadership Development Program
St. Louis District

Back Row: Steven Wagner, Kelly Bertoglio, Darren Mulford, Brandon Lewis, Dave Kreighbaum, Shawn Sullivan, Jim Lovelace, Leonard Hopkins; Front Row: June Jeffries, Cathy Van Arsdale, Lee Mitchell, Phil Manhart, Susan Wilson, Katie Huff. Not pictured: Kip Runyon

USACE photo by Alan Dooley

Fees waived at Corps Recreation Areas for GWOT Deployees

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced September 23 that it will waive day use and camping fees for active service military personnel and DoD civilians who are on mid- or post-deployment (reintegration) leave from duty in a hostile fire zone to include Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other deployments to support the Global War on Terror.

The Corps began waiving recreation fees for active service personnel on temporary leave from duty in Iraq in 2003. Today's announcement expands the waiver to cover DoD civilians and active service military personnel on mid or post leave from all deployments in support of the Global War on Terror.

"Our intent is to recognize the selfless service of these men and women to our nation and the world," said Steve Stockton, the Corps Director of Civil Works. "The 2,476 Corps-operated recreation sites nationwide provide excellent opportunities to find renewal, solace, and inspiration, and to reconnect with families and friends."

Active service military personnel and DoD civilians on leave will be required to show identification and leave orders/forms upon arrival to the recreation sites to obtain the waiver. The waiver will also apply to all immediate family members accompanying them on their visit. The waiver will be applied to day use and camping fees. Fees will be waived on a walk-up and space available basis, as well as for reservations made through the National Recreation Reservation Service call center. However, fees will not be waived for on-line reservations made through Recreation.gov.

In addition, state, local and other managing entities of recreation areas located on Corps lands are encouraged, but not required, to comply with this waiver of fees in the areas they manage.

The Corps is the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor recreation, managing 423 projects (mostly lakes) nationwide and hosting more than 372 million visitors per year.

Additional information about the Corps recreation program is available at www.CorpsLakes.us.

St. Louis District availability

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District, operates five multi-purpose lakes at which this benefit will be made available to eligible personnel. Three lakes are in Illinois and two are in Missouri. Specific information and availability information for these lakes may be obtained at:

Illinois:	
Carlyle Lake	618-594-2484
Lake Shelbyville	217-774-3951
Rend Lake	618-724-2493
Missouri:	
Mark Twain Lake	573-735-4097
Wappapello Lake	573-222-8562

Mark That Date

This year's Holiday Party, sponsored by the Civilian Activities Council, is set for Thursday, December 18.

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