



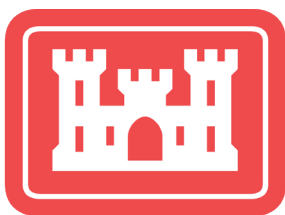
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, CHARLESTON DISTRICT

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US Army Corps of Engineers®

Charleston District

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We'd like to give special thanks to Chaplain
LTC Jamison C. Bowman and the Soldiers of the
2-60 Infantry Battalion, 193rd Infantry Brigade
Color Guard for their service during the 2023
Change of Command Ceremony.

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Photo by Dylan Burnell

Construction of a new parking garage at William Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Affairs Medical Center has completed. The new garage adds 300 new parking spots and is designed to increase patient safety while enhancing access to the hospital.



Greetings Palmetto Castle Readers,

As I approach my third month at the helm, it's with a sense of both pride and excitement that I welcome you to this latest edition of our Palmetto Castle. The journey thus far has been nothing short of exhilarating, and it's an honor to have taken the reins as your commander.

I want to thank everyone who attended our Change of Command ceremony (page 8). We had record attendance with close to 250 people, including 7 area mayors and several Congressional staffers. That says a lot about the strength of this District's relationships.

It is a privilege to become the Charleston District's 90th Commander and District Engineer. The opportunity to command this outstanding District is a responsibility I take very seriously, and I will devote myself fully to this state.

The Charleston team has an exceptional reputation across the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and I am honored to join this group of dedicated professionals who make a tremendous impact every day.

I have served in the Corps before as the assistant operations officer at the Los Angeles District and the deputy program manager for the Border Fence Program in 2008 at the Los Angeles District's Arizona/Nevada area office.

I was also the commander of the 59th Forward Engineer Support Team (FEST-A) at the USACE Tulsa District and in Wiesbaden, Germany (HQ USAREUR-AF), developing critical projects across the span of eastern Europe.

These experiences, along with my other 15 years serving in the Army, have prepared me well to take on this challenging new assignment.

The team saw a lot of success under Lt. Col. Drew Johannes' leadership, and I am excited to help complete the hard work of closing out this fiscal year and preparing for the next. We are dedicated to finishing strong and delivering quality services and products to our customers.

This issue is filled with some of the exciting things the team has been working on this summer, especially in the Midlands. We have been busy in Columbia working for Veterans Affairs Medical Center (page 12) and on Ft Jackson (page 6).

Selfless service is one of the Army's values and I can think of no bigger act than volunteering to help those impacted by the devastating wildfires in Hawaii. Please read how one of our employees aided that community with her GIS expertise (page 18). Another such act was our recent Wounded Warrior Dove Hunt (page 14) where over 40 veterans enjoyed a fun, relaxing day full of camaraderie.

My family is happy to be here in the Lowcountry. My wife, Lina, and our children are excited to take advantage of everything the state offers. We love spending time outdoors and South Carolina has so much to offer. I look forward to serving you for the next two years and my door is always open.



Robert W. Nahabedian, P.E., ENV SP
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
Commander and District Engineer

FORT JACKSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RECEIVES PLAYGROUND UPGRADE FOR MILITARY KIDS

Story by Nathan Wilkes

Photos courtesy of C.C. Pickney Elementary School

In the heart of the Fort Jackson military community, laughter and youthful exuberance fill the air at the C.C. Pinckney Elementary School's newly resurfaced playground area.

The playground, a cherished haven for military kids, serves as a place of joy and stability amidst the challenges of military life. However, time took its toll on the playground's old rubber surfaces. With many divots and scars requiring constant piecemeal repairs, a decision was made to enhance the playground's appearance and ensure the safety and happiness of the children looking forward to recess every day.

Completed just before school began this fall, the total project encompassed the replacement of 13,500 square feet of poured rubber surface under two exterior

playgrounds at the school. The work to restore the playground's surface was a collocative effort between several federal agencies, all dedicated to providing the best services to military families stationed at Fort Jackson.

"We have been working with the Fort Jackson Department of Public Works, the Department of Defense Education Activity and maintenance personnel from the on-base schools on many projects," said Debra Mullenex, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District engineer. "From start to finish, the work at C.C. Pinckney took about two months to tear out the old surface, install the thick springy layer and then the color section. Many of the students rode by on their bikes as we worked, and it was so rewarding to see them light up excitedly."



“Our military kids deserve the best, and this project is a testament to that. Now, with the new surface installed, the students can enjoy the playground again and it continues to be a safe space for our children to thrive.”

Operated by DoDEA, C. C. Pinckney Elementary is one of two elementary schools on Fort Jackson. The Charleston District oversaw the construction and commissioning of the new Pierce Terrace Elementary School that was opened in 2020.

“We’ve worked a lot with Charleston District on Fort Jackson to modernization and repair projects at Pinckney Elementary, including a parking addition, driveway and parking lot replacement and a new canopy at the school’s entrance,” said Charles King, DoDEA facilities engineer and project manager. “Several more projects will be awarded soon for the school, including restroom renovations and replacing exterior doors and access controls.”

As one of only two Federally-operated school systems, DoDEA is responsible for planning, directing,

coordinating and managing pre-kindergarten through 12th grade educational programs on behalf of the Department of Defense. In 2022, DoDEA test scores were higher than in each of the 50 states in the U.S.

“Our military kids deserve the best, and this project is a testament to that,” said Dr. Tammy Shadd, school principal. “Now, with the new surface installed, the students can enjoy the playground again and it continues to be a safe space for our children to thrive.”

The new poured rubber surface is engineered to be impact-absorbent, reducing the risk of injuries during falls. With a safe playground surface in place, parents and educators can rest assured that children are enjoying themselves in an environment designed with their well-being in mind.





CHARLESTON DISTRICT WELCOMES 90TH DISTRICT ENGINEER

Story by Francisco G. Hamm

Photos by Dylan Burnell and Nathan Wilkes

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District welcomed its 90th commander July 18 during a change of command ceremony at the Citadel's Holliday Alumni Center.

Lt. Col. Robert Nahabedian assumed command from Lt. Col. Andrew Johannes. The ceremony was officiated by Brig. Gen. Daniel Hibner, commanding general, South Atlantic Division, USACE.

Nahabedian brings more than 20 years of military leadership to the position. He most recently served with NATO's 1st German Netherland Corps in Münster, Germany as a policy staff officer. He also served in a variety of leadership positions in the U.S., the Middle East and Europe.

Nahabedian holds a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering from the U.S. Military Academy, a master's degree in engineering

management from Missouri University of Science and Technology, and a master's degree in engineering management from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

"It is great to be back working for the Corps of Engineers again and my family could not be happier that our Corps' assignment will be in this beautiful state," said Lt. Col. Robert Nahabedian, incoming district commander, Charleston District.

The Charleston District has a long history of working hard for the citizens of South Carolina and the new commander said he is honored to take the torch and continue delivering engineering solutions to the challenges facing our communities, state and nation.

"I look forward to getting to know our partners, customers and stakeholders as they are key to our mission's success," Nahabedian.



RANGER TURNED REGULATOR BLAZES NEW TRAIL IN COLUMBIA

Story by Nathan Wilkes

Photos by Dylan Burnell

In a world where professionals often tread on predictable career paths, there are those who blaze their own trails, leaving an indelible mark in their wake. Rebecca Downey, a Regulatory project manager with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District is one such trailblazer. Her journey from a young intern to an accomplished leader in the field of environmental protection is nothing short of inspirational.

Graduating with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in 2013, Downey's early professional life was marked by curiosity and a relentless passion for the natural world.

"I really wanted to get some hands-on experience with the things I was learning in school so when the opportunity came to join the Corps for an internship, I dove right in," she said. "I got my start at the St. Louis District and had the opportunity to work and lead interpretive programs at the National Great Rivers Museum, Melvin Price Locks and Dam and the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary."

With USACE, Downey not only gained hands-on experience in understanding and preserving ecosystems, but she also laid the foundation for what would become an extraordinary career.

"After my internship, I applied for a USACE program aimed at recent grads for park ranger positions," she said. "I was fortunate enough to get selected for a Park Ranger position with the Mobile District at West Point Lake in Georgia."

At West Point Lake, on the Chattahoochee River, Downey worked for four years leading and managing recreational campgrounds.



"My time at West Point Lake was my first official position where I had my own programs to run and I learned so much about being a ranger and the importance of public affairs and community engagement," she said. "I learned about bridging the gap between environmental protection and public awareness. Having fun is important, but educating visitors about the delicate balance between recreation and conservation was challenging and rewarding."

In 2018, Downey moved to Augusta, Ga. to begin work with the Savannah District at J. Strom Thurmond Lake and Dam. There she served as the environmental compliance and public affairs coordinator along with her regular duties as a park ranger.

"Working at Thurmond gave me a broader knowledge

of the Corps and I was able to work on a wide range of projects," Downey said. "I managed public affairs for the lake, water safety, shoreline management, real estate and even did a few temporary broadening assignments in dam safety coordination and hurricane assistance."

In 2022 USACE hosted a national hiring event for the organization's Regulatory program. With her background in biological sciences and her passion for public outreach, Downey applied for and accepted an offer with the Charleston District's Midlands office in Columbia, S.C.

"I loved working as a ranger, but it did require a lot of time in uniform and working on holiday weekends when many visitors come to the lake," she said. "This new opportunity provides a lot of flexibility, professional growth and morale here in Columbia is really wonderful. It is a very comfortable atmosphere and there are so many opportunities to be a bigger

part of the team, not just in Regulatory, but project management, safety and more."

Joining the Charleston District last November, Downey has already proven herself an integral part of the Columbia team.

"Rebecca is an excellent addition and even though she isn't much of a Clemson fan we are very happy to have her here with us," said Bryce McKoy, chief of the Regulatory Division's Northwest Branch. "Her previous experience as a ranger and in public engagement fills a much-needed niche here in the Midlands. We couldn't be happier to have her onboard."

From intern to project manager, Downey's trailblazing is a testament to the power of passion, dedication and vision. Her remarkable career serves as an inspiration to all who aspire to harmonize nature and development for a sustainable future.



WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN DORN VA HOSPITAL REHABILITATION CENTER TAKES SHAPE

Story by Francisco G. Hamm

Photos by Dylan Burnell

A new rehabilitation center is being built at the William Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Columbia, South Carolina. The rehab center will provide a much-needed service to veterans, enabling them to continue their rehabilitation journeys and fill the halls with hope, determination, and inspiration.

The Charleston District has partnered with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs to build the state-of-the-art \$13.8M rehabilitation center. The District is scheduled to turn the project over before the end of the year to the VA where they will commence activation/outfitting to prepare it to treat new patients in the near future.

The two-story facility rehabilitation facility will include a large physical therapy clinic, a gym, exam rooms, treatment rooms and offices, and other support spaces. The total gross area will be 16,729 square feet with 10,302 square feet on the first floor and 6,427 square feet on the second floor.

According to Robert Sorenson, Interagency and International Support project manager, "Everything has been going smoothly with no critical path impacting issues."

However, with a big project like this, there were challenges to overcome.

"We had to overcome some significant obstacles early on that created significant threats to a successful outcome but with a strong SAC team and partnership with VA Engineering and Medical Center Leadership we were able to develop and implement some innovative solutions to avoid major cost and schedule impacts."

"It's always a challenge when working in this environment with another agency, who provided the design through their own contracting channels and then USACE contracted out the construction," said Addison Layfield, the Charleston District contracting branch chief and procuring officer for this project.





Layfield, a 13-year veteran with USACE, added, "It's a lot of different groups of people that must work together to be successful."

Sorenson, who was the assistant chief engineer with the VA Hospital in Charleston prior to coming to the Charleston District in 2020, understands both agency missions and this led to a smoother project and a great partnership.

"This project has worked out well for me since I have a long history of working at the VA," he said. "It's been great working with the Corps putting my VA background and relationships to effective use," he said.

From an engineering perspective, what makes this project different?

According to architect and project technical lead, John Bell Hines, "The importance of this design cannot be overstated as it enables recovery by engaging our body and mind's natural evolutionary healing ability."

"The center of the buildings design is the large two-story exercise area that is open to the exterior views and natural light," said Bell. "Our body's ability to heal when exposed to a healthy stress-free environment has been proven beyond any doubt."

According to Hines, his role in the engineering division

is best described as a design quality assurance. "Quality is a simple word that has many dimensions such as special quality, functional quality, structural quality, and finish quality," he said.

The most rewarding aspect is knowing the new rehab facility will improve the help that veterans will receive and deserve, and Hines has an excellent background and personal experience.

With seven years as a project manager for Wounded Warrior related projects at Bethesda Military Hospital in DC and 25 years of private practice, Hines is in tune with rehabilitation. However, it's a recent accident where he was hit by a car and needed nine months of rehabilitation therapy that gives him the clearest picture.

"The actual treatment is just one aspect of recovery," he said. "Recovery involves both the mental, emotional, and physical components. There are many ways the environment where therapy is provided can enhance or even stop the success of therapy."

"This facility makes a huge difference in the betterment of a veteran's life," said Hines.

The walls, halls and rooms within this facility will soon be filled with veterans' inspirational stories and the VA's team of doctors, nurses, specialists who will help them in their rehabilitation journeys.

WOUNDED WARRIOR DOVE HUNT RETURNS TO COOPER RIVER REDIVERSION PROJECT

Story by Nathan Wilkes

Photos by Dennis Franklin

As the afternoon sun struggled to break through a heavy veil of grey skies, and scattered rain showers danced upon the landscape, a remarkable gathering of camouflage-clad hunters took shape, one that bridged the gap between nature's unpredictability and the unwavering spirit of America's wounded warriors.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District, in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the South Carolina Department of Veteran's Affairs, breathed life back into a cherished tradition on Sept. 9 – the annual Wounded Warrior Dove Hunt. Held at the Charleston District's Cooper River Rediversion Project in St. Stephen, the event marked a return after its unfortunate cancellation in 2022 due to inclement weather.

"The Wounded Warrior Dove Hunt is a testament to the unwavering commitment we share with SCDNR and our Lowcountry veterans to honor and support our nation's wounded veterans," said Ronnie June, CRRP's natural resources manager. "This event provides an opportunity for veterans to connect with nature, enjoy camaraderie and engage in the therapeutic and recreational benefits of outdoor activities, specifically dove hunting."

More than 40 wounded warriors and their families attended the event. Spread out over 90 acres of game fields, the resounding thunder of shotguns proved a testament to the enduring spirit of America's veterans and their ability to find solace and healing in the great outdoors.

"This is such a great event and it's a privilege to work alongside our partners to provide such a meaningful experience to our wounded warriors," said David Rozelle, SCDVA director of operations, wounded warrior and dove hunt participant. "Experiences like these can work wonders for our veterans and we'd like to see events like this statewide."

The SCDNR plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of this event, providing the huntable land and expertise

in wildlife management for USACE. SCDNR regulations permit shooting doves on or over harvested fields composed of combined or picked corn, combined soybean fields, or other fall harvested crops. Fields where crops are grown and manipulated for wildlife management purposes are also included as well as fields where wheat or other grains have recently been planted.

Under a long-term agreement, roughly 95 percent of Charleston District's CRRP property at St. Stephen's Powerhouse is managed as a state wildlife management area.

SCDNR works diligently to create a safe and enjoyable environment for participants while facilitating the dove hunting experience and the Wounded Warrior Fishing Day held in the spring.

The cancellation of last year's dove hunt due to inclement weather only fueled the determination to make this year's gathering even more memorable.

Under SCDNR dove hunting regulations, hunters are permitted up to 15 doves per day in specified wildlife management areas. Through their collective effort, dozens of doves were harvested.

"We were disappointed to have to cancel last year's event, but we are thrilled to be back this year despite a little rain," said Lt. Col. Robert Nahabedian, Charleston District commander. "The excitement of all the veterans that came out today for the dove hunt is a testament to the indomitable spirit of veterans and a reminder of the enduring bond between those who serve our country and the land they call home."





USACE ALUM TAKES COMMAND IN CHARLESTON

LT. COL. ROBERT NAHABEDIAN

Story and photo by Francisco G. Hamm

Family photo courtesy of Lina Nahabedian

As he grew into a 'self-described' academic nerd with athletic abilities at New Fairfield High School, where he played baseball, Robert Nahabedian discovered his true passion was for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. He knew early on that he wanted to be an engineer.

He soon found his calling and his journey led him to West Point, New York, where he graduated from the United States Military Academy and was commissioned as an engineer officer in May 2003.

Years later, now a lieutenant colonel, Nahabedian continues his quest for challenges and traditions.

The Army recently provided him an opportunity to assume command as the 90th commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston District on July 18, 2023.

"It's my honor and distinct privilege to become the commander of the Charleston District," he said. "I am very excited about being a part of this world-class organization, which, like the Lowcountry, is steeped in tradition and shares a rich and diverse heritage."

Previously, he was the assistant operations officer at the Los Angeles District and the deputy program manager for the California and Arizona international border fence program in 2008 at the Los Angeles

District's Arizona/Nevada area office.

Years later from 2018-2020, he also served as the commander of the 59th Forward Engineer Support Team (FEST-A) at the Tulsa District and in Wiesbaden, Germany (HQ USAREUR-AF), developing critical projects across the span of eastern Europe in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve and the European Deterrence Initiative.

"As a young captain at the Los Angeles District, I always had an ambition to be a district commander and Charleston was always at the top of my list," he said, shaking his head in disbelief. "We still can't believe we are here, and my family couldn't be more thrilled!"

Nahabedian, who most recently served with the 1st German-Netherlands Corps in Münster, Germany as a policy staff officer, assumed command from Lt. Col. Andrew Johannes during a ceremony officiated by Brig. Gen. Daniel Hibner, commanding general, South Atlantic Division, USACE.

A devout family man, he learned early on from his parents what is important in life. He credits them for

always being there for him, especially during his two deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, where he faced many challenges.

He says it's important to focus on and successfully accomplish the mission, but the odds of success go up when you are taking care of the people around you along the way.

One of Nahabedian's key priorities for the District will be continuing to foster close relationships with local communities, stakeholders, and industry partners. Through proactive communication, he intends to ensure that the District's projects align with the needs and aspirations of the region, leaving a lasting, positive impact.

"I look forward to meeting and working with all our stakeholders, partners, friends and citizens alike, to help us solve the nation's toughest engineering challenges and continue to make South Carolina a great place to live, work and play. Please know my door is always open to those we serve," said Nahabedian. "I know I have my work cut out for me, but I am committed to the success of South Carolina and the well-being of its citizens and our Charleston District team."



CHARLESTON DISTRICT EMPLOYEE STREAMLINES INFORMATION FLOW FOR USACE HAWAII WILDFIRES

Story by Dylan Burnell

Photos by Patrick Moes and Staff Sgt. Matthew A. Foster

Soon after the devastating wildfires that struck Maui Aug. 8, first responder crews from around the nation deployed to the island. In a strong showing of national, regional, and local support, personnel from the Hawaii National Guard, U.S. Army, U.S. Army Reserve, Federal Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers joined the response mission. Among those responding from USACE was Jennifer Kist, a geographer with the Charleston District.

Kist did not hesitate to answer the call for USACE emergency management personnel to deploy, exemplifying the Army's core value of selfless service. Arriving in Maui, Kist immediately got to work streamlining information flow to make USACE's support to Maui County more efficient.

"I was developing and creating tools to manage information so it can freely flow and be automatically pulled," said Kist. "It means a lot to me to enable our engineers and others to do their jobs in a more efficient way. I was able to automate a lot of the bureaucratic burdens, allowing the team to focus on providing temporary power to wells and other critical public facilities."

Kist is the Geospatial Coordinator for Charleston District. Her regular job entails leading a team of geographers who analyze, interpret and catalogue data for use by all of Charleston District's projects and mission areas. She also runs the engineering common operating picture, or eCOP, which is a USACE headquarters project.





During a disaster response, the job involves just one mission area but data in an emergency is a 24/7 occupation. There is an incredible amount of information collected that needs to be logged, organized, reported and distributed. It takes time to do all of this, which can pull engineers away from the response itself. The results of Kist's work reduce the workload and time it takes for engineers and team members to collect, organize and report data so they can get back into the field. In many scenarios data can even be streamed in real time from the field or the disaster site back to the emergency operations center, USACE headquarters or even directly to response partners such as FEMA.

More than 50 USACE personnel from around the nation joined Kist in the response with the same priority: the life, health, and safety of all affected by the wildfires. USACE received several FEMA mission assignments including national activation, regional activation, debris management, debris execution (personal property debris removal), temporary emergency power and critical public facilities.

The teams have installed 20 generators to provide temporary power for critical public facilities like hospitals, shelters, and pump stations; have completed assessments to provide temporary facilities for an

elementary school, responsible for 700 students; and have begun clearing household hazardous materials from Maui residents' properties in coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Kist and the team found themselves playing a very important role when President Biden came to survey the destruction caused by the fires. They installed backup power to the civic center, where the President addressed the people of Lahaina, by installing two generators to provide air conditioning throughout the building. In recognition of their work, Kist and others each received a certificate of appreciation from the White House communications agency.

Among the destruction, there is one glimmer of hope for a well-known symbol in Lahaina. The 150-year-old Banyan tree, which draws in people from around the world, still shows signs of life. Though its leaves were scorched, the trunk survived. After much work from the locals, who see the banyan tree as a symbol of their town and resiliency, the tree has sprouted new roots.

The road to recovery for Lahaina will be long and difficult, but with people like Jennifer Kist, USACE be there to support the life, health and safety of all who were affected.

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