

District moving to the left with ARRA effort



By Jim Pogue
Chief, Public Affairs Office

Obligating all the ARRA funds you receive within the allotted time is a really “good” thing. But how do you go from good to “great?” You simply move all the end of the year deadlines up by six months.

Not an easy assignment, but that’s exactly the task given to the Corps by Civil Works Chief Maj. Gen. Bo Temple. “As we look into fiscal year 2010, ensure that planned awards are moved to the left and are scheduled by 30 Mar 10 so we make 100 percent obligation before the end of fiscal year 2010,” General Temple directed in a Sept. 21 e-mail sent to leaders across the Corps.

Anticipating this possibility, Memphis

District Commander Col. Tom Smith had already directed Engineering and Construction Division Deputy Chief Steve Williamson and his Stimulus Team to come up with a strategy for accomplishing this.

“Col. Smith had us come up with a categorized list of projects with minimum, moderate or maximum risk of not being awarded by the end of March 2010,” Williamson said. “Then the project managers, Contracting, employees in Engineering and Construction Division and others got together to figure out strategies to ensure we succeeded in meeting the March deadline.”

Elaine Newbaker-London is project manager for the White River Backwater Project in Arkansas. She was one of the managers challenged to move up an already tight deadline – in this case, work at the Graham Burke Pumping Station.

“The work called for us to install new trash racks and sills*,” she said. “The original deadline was the end of May 2010 but we moved it up to February 28.”

Newbaker-London went on to explain how they got to this new date.

“It took close coordination with the Project Delivery Team, especially the Design Branch,” she said. “They understood the need to advance the schedule. We discussed what could be done realistically and were able to move the award up to February.”

In addition to the ordinary systematic processes that had to be navigated, other challenges to meeting project deadlines include unpredictable weather, fluctuating river levels, and unforeseen problems contractors may encounter.

“We’re trying to factor in some risk to the equation when we’re awarding contracts,” said Contracting Chief Jean Todd. “By realistically considering what we’re faced with, we’re more likely to get the results we want.”

Derrick Smith, Lawrence Thomas and Ken Bright all worked with their teams to develop similar plans for meeting the accelerated execution deadlines.

Diverse teams, with members from across the organization, all focused on success. That’s one way the Memphis District is working to ensure we continue our journey from good to great.

** The new trash racks will be located further away from the pump station and will reduce the amount of debris that enters the pump bays’ inlets. The sills are located at the bottom of the inlet structures for the pumps and have deteriorated. When the inlet areas must be dewatered to work on the pumps, stoplogs are put into place to create a dry area for maintenance. The stoplogs rest on the sills and must make a watertight seal.*

Women-owned small business contracts on the rise

By Stacy A. Ouellette
Public Affairs Specialist

Teamwork across the District has been key in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) contracts. For District Small Business Program Manager Karen Brady, this has made all the difference for women owned small businesses (WOSB).

“At the end of June, I projected our women owned small business contract category as not accomplishing our assigned goal for fiscal year 2009,” Brady explained.

“During the following month, the entire Contracting Division worked hard to ensure obligated funds that addressed this demographic,” she added.

To meet program goals, more than five percent of total contract dollars obligated for the District needed to be awarded to small businesses owned by women.

“The WOSB is a peculiar category in that we cannot set aside a project for WOSB concerns so accomplishment of the goal is hard to project,” Brady said.

“What we do is try to achieve the

goal through the Small Business Administrations 8(a) Program, which allows you to select a contractor from their portfolio and negotiate with them exclusively,” she added.

By using this process, Brady can match projects to the capabilities of a WOSB that was in the Small Business Administration’s portfolio of contractors. “We predicted a Small Business Program where our total obligations would reach \$120.0M and 5.8 percent of that was \$6,960,000 for WOSB,” Brady said.

“At that time, we had obligated only \$4.5 million and without targeted projects in sight, there weren’t any additional obligations that we could count on to meet the goal,” she said.

Thanks to ARRA work, the District achieved their goal totaling \$8.8 million for WOSB out of the small business program’s \$122.5 million.

There are five categories with preference programs which allow projects to be set aside for them exclusively to meet yearly goals.

“The problem with the set aside program for women is that when we were first

given the goal, the perception was that many men changed their companies over into their wife’s name or made her the president of the company,” Brady said.

Because there is not a SBA certification process in place for WOSB, the District does not have a preference program for this category.

Until there is a process approved and implemented, the Memphis District will continue to use the SBA 8(a) program to address women owned small businesses.

“Presently, no funds are available to SBA to implement the program to provide federal contract assistance to WOSB concerns,” Brady said.

In some cases, there are a few WOSB contracts awarded with options for additional years and those will be the ones we counted on to support WOSB goals in the future, she added.

The Memphis District will continue to inform WOSB owners, who have been awarded contracts through competition of upcoming procurements in their area of expertise.