

Recycling center points Polk toward Net Zero Waste 2020

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FORT POLK, La. — “Reduce, reuse, recycle” has become a household phrase; yet being a steward of the environment sometimes takes a backseat when life gets busy. Fortunately for Fort Polk, this mantra holds fast under the guidance of the Qualified Recycling and Net Zero Waste programs, both run by the Environmental Compliance Division of the Directorate of Public Works. On Nov. 26, members of the Fort Polk community witnessed the grand opening of the Net Zero Waste Center located in bldg 3622 at the intersection of Georgia and Maine.

In April 2011, Fort Polk was chosen as one of six Net Zero Waste pilot installations within the Army challenged to reach zero solid waste entering landfills by the year 2020. At inception, four work groups were assigned the task of making recommendations for implementation to drive the net zero waste initiative to fruition.

Ted Hammerschmidt, Fort Polk Qualified Recycling Program environmental contractor, said, “We based our recommendations on one simple question — Why does Fort Polk exist? — to train and deploy, to feed and equip, to build and maintain, to promote the welfare and administer the needs of the installation.”

Eleven projects were immediately accepted for implementation in fiscal years 2012 and 2013. “One of the results is what we are celebrating today — the grand opening of the Net Zero Waste Center,” Hammerschmidt said.

Hammerschmidt likened the idea of sustainability to the triple bottom line economic mold that incorporates people, planet and profit. “In terms of the mission, much of the 24 million pounds of municipal solid waste generated at Fort Polk last year found its way into a landfill — which is at best considered a long-term vault, and at worst — a short-term storage facility with fissures, cracks and crevices that ultimately create the potential for contaminated fluids to impact the environment through the water, air or soil.

“Today Fort Polk’s landfill contractor, located in Sabine Parish and home to Peason Ridge Training Facility, serves as a recharge area where the rainwater that falls there finds its way into the Fort Polk drinking water. The waters at Fort Polk serve as a recharge area for the aquifer that services much of Louisiana. There’s an obvious impact with the triple bottom line encompassing the mission, the envi-

ronment and the community where the decisions we make and the consequences of our actions have a cumulative effect on natural resources.”

Hammerschmidt challenged the audience to consider the triple bottom line in three distinct ways when recycling on an individual basis.

“Every one of us — military, civilian, adult and child needs to think of the mission, the environment and the consequences to the community. “When we think in this way, it’s really easy to say ‘no’ to Styrofoam because it’s not just a single-use incident without long-term effects.” He also encouraged taking personal responsibility and accountability as a means to embrace environmental stewardship. “Ultimately, with the scarcity of resources available, the reality is very simple — we need to invest our dollars in training Soldiers and taking care of Families. In that regard, everything becomes a resource.”

Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk Commander Brig. Gen. William B. Hickman reiterated, “It does take everyone — one person’s actions make a big difference and the combined forces of the entire Fort Polk community will have a huge impact on helping the installation become net-zero compliant by 2020.”

Before the ribbon cutting ceremony, Dr. Charles Stagg, Chief of the Environmental Office at Fort Polk, recounted the pioneering efforts of the late retired Sgt. 1st Class Steve Gibson in establishing the JRTC and Fort Polk QRP in May 2008. Money generated from recycling through the QRP is returned to the installation.

During his tenure, Gibson transformed the program — increasing revenue from recycled products from \$30,000 to \$300,000 in one year. With these funds, the QRP enhances the lives of Soldiers and Family members through contributions to Fort Polk’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation. Last year, the QRP donated more than \$30,000 to Fort Polk’s MWR.

“Because of Gibson’s endowments, the commanding general and the garrison commander have in their toolbox a financial engine that can operate as a real business entity carrying over sales returns from one fiscal year to the next,” said Stagg. “This will allow Fort Polk to reach its goal of Net Zero Waste, maintain a stable contract workforce without negatively impacting the post federal employment levels and form healthy business relationships with regional recyclables buyers.

“The QRP, established under Gib-



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Fran Gibson cuts the recycled paper ribbon at the Fort Polk Net Zero Waste Center grand opening Nov. 26. Fort Polk Garrison Commander Col. Roger Shuck, Command Sgt. Maj. Ronald Semerena and Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk Commander Brig. Gen. William Hickman help with the honors.

son’s guidance, is now a valued member of the JRTC and Fort Polk community and consistently contributes to quality of life enhancements for our Soldiers and Families.”

Hickman expressed gratitude for the environmental staff’s resolute undertaking of the net zero policy challenge. “I would like to thank the environmental team here at Fort Polk for what they’ve done. This facility is a culmination of a lot of hard work over the last several months. It’s been a team effort. Leadership across Fort Polk will continue to take this initiative seriously by working to eliminate the waste of operations as we go forward and take this endeavor to the next step,” Hickman said.

North Polk Elementary School Assistant Principal Jennifer Coriell and South Polk Elementary School Principal Charles Balthrop accepted

awards for winning the “Can You Recycle Better than an Elementary Student?” white paper recycling competition that ended in January. The contest pitted the joint efforts of the elementary schools against Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital and the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk headquarters, bldg 350.

Hickman praised the school children’s efforts in the recycling contest. “Recycling isn’t hard. If you need an example of how to do it well, look to our children. The kids beat the adults, winning the competition by a mile. Through their actions, our students are speaking to us loud and clear — recycling is important. Follow their example because they have much to teach us. We need to show them we are willing caretakers of the environment and we’ll do what’s right for the next generation.”

Fort Polk encouraged to recycle

The Net Zero Waste Center is now open. The facility, bldg 3622 at the intersection of Georgia and Maine, accepts the following recyclable material:

- White paper — includes white printer paper, white tablet paper and white cardstock. Ribbon shredded white paper is also accepted. Pulverized or cross-cut paper cannot be recycled.
- Mixed paper — includes colored paper, newspaper, maga-

zines, cereal boxes/box board manila folders and envelopes

- Aluminum — includes empty aluminum cans and scrap pieces

- Used motor oil
 - Used cooking oil
 - Scrap metal
 - Automotive batteries
- Community recycles day is 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. every Wednesday. For more information call 531-7556.