

McConnell AFB's New Outdoor Recreation Area Comes to Life



Ever since Wing leadership at McConnell AFB, Kan., decided to close the base golf course in 2009 — and give the 165 acres of land to the Outdoor Recreation program — Outdoor Recreation Director Jim Vause and his staff have capitalized on this great opportunity to develop the land into a thriving recreation area, and take the program to new heights.

“We were able to move Outdoor Recreation from an older, smaller facility into the Defense Reutilization Marketing Office (DRMO) compound, which provides much more space for all of the recreational equipment that we have,” says Vause. “We are now co-located with DRMO and do a good job of working with them to joint-use the facility.”

In addition to an office area and displays, the Outdoor Recreation facility has ample space in the back of the facility with racks featuring new pull behind tubes (for boats and jet skis), new Archery equipment, all kinds of camping gear, large toys (such as giant checkers and Connect Four), inflatable games/events, paintball equipment, 19 ATVs (plus safety training), lawn care equipment — “stuff that downtown you are paying big dollars for,” notes Vause.

Named after Col. Michael V. Krueger, USAF, former vice commander for the 22nd Air Refueling Wing at McConnell AFB, who died on March 3, 2009, the new Krueger recreation area was born with the idea that it could provide something for the entire base community. New recreational activities at the area including a driving range, disc golf course, archery range, RC car and ATV courses, paintball fields, family camping, fishing ponds and picnic areas. In addition to connecting all cart paths and creating walking trails throughout the area, Outdoor Recreation also inherited two ponds.

“We invested a substantial amount of time in figuring out exactly what we wanted to do with the Outdoor Recreation area,” notes Vause. “We feel that although we have accomplished a lot in a short time, we are just getting started in terms of the potential to develop this land.”



A RECREATION SITE IS BORN

Over the past year, Outdoor Recreation, Civil Engineering and the Army Corps of Engineers have been working together to breathe new life into a recreation area that was once a military dump site.

“We are now working on making this recreation area a green zone,” notes Vause. “We have paintball netting that we use around the paintball field, but we are getting ready to put in Cypress trees, which grow 15-18 feet tall and can provide a natural hedgerow around the field. We are also looking into putting solar lights for the street lamps and for the security lights, as well as solar-powered water pumps to aerate both of the ponds and restock them with fish.”

Vause points out that Outdoor Recreation is also getting ready to put a fence around a honey bee tree in the recreation area in an effort to protect the honeybees.

“We are working very closely with environmental and the Army Corps of Engineers here at Fall River, to develop the recreation area even further,” he explains. “This is 165 acres and we have a great opportunity. Let’s leave it there for everyone to enjoy and keep it as green as possible. We are putting in 12 camping areas around the ponds, and then right up the middle of the golf course we are putting in another 28 camping sites for our FamCamp.”

The base also just installed a new playground and installed water and electric to the two pavilions that are next to it, as well as a bathhouse and laundry room. “That is the first step to a big FamCamp there,” says Vause. “We are looking to purchase some NEOS systems and run them on solar energy. They require 12 volts and we can set that up to run on pure solar.”

In the area of environmental friendliness, Outdoor Recreation found a place that sells flavored shot for hunting. “It is a program they have developed to make shot out of natural spices, like garlic, for example.”

The base also purchased 30 ADA-compliant recycled plastic picnic tables from Plastic Recycling of Iowa Falls. “We got the tables and matching garbage cans at a great price and they come with a 75-year warranty,” he points out.

The base also bought boats for the ponds, and when the base Exchange stopped selling fishing gear, benefited from that equipment as well.

“We try to be as resourceful as possible and are always looking for innovative ways to make things happen,” notes

Vause. “These guys are here for us 365, 24 hours a day and they deserve the same kind of commitment from us.”

REUTILIZATION EFFORTS

McConnell AFB is a great example of a base that pools its resources, talents and efforts to provide the best possible programs, equipment and facilities to the base community.

“We are big into the reutilization thing,” says Vause. “We have gone out to other bases, brought in their old equipment, refurbished it here and put it back in service, at a minimal cost.”

He recalls one project that defines the commitment to teamwork at McConnell: “Laughlin AFB had a 17-foot ski boat, an Invader that had been scrapped in DRMO and was brought in here. It needed new seats, new paint, fiberglass work, and had no trailer, but the refurbishment project became a true joint operation. We [Outdoor Recreation] did the fiberglass work and exterior maintenance, our National Guard counterparts through the parachute shop did all the sewing for all the seats, maintenance provided all of the polyurethane white paint for the boat and transportation painted it. We even had the ‘keeper of the planes’ emblem painted right down the side of the boat.

“When you look at that boat,” Vause points out, “that defines how McConnell operates. We reach across the table and says ‘what can I do and how can I help?’ We are all retired guys from the flight line or military of some sort, so we have the same mentality of thinking outside the box.”

A good example of the base’s resourcefulness is the acquisition of expensive trailers from the General Services Administration (GSA). “After FEMA turned in their travel trailers into GSA, we were the first DoD agency at the very first screening; we got 20 trailers,” notes Vause.

Although McConnell is categorized as a small-to-medium-sized base, Vause points out that he provides support for much more than the 3,000 inside the gate. “In addition to those we serve here on base, we also have Guard, Reservists, DoD civilians, Federal employees — these are our customers too, and we need to take care of them. If you only look inside the fence my customer base is 3,000 but in reality it is really 59,000 people. Granted, my primary customer — active duty — is inside the fence, but we can’t forget about our Guard and Reserve guys.”

POPULAR PROGRAMS

One of the most popular activities at the new recreation area is paintball. The base has a speedball and wooded course and provides all of the equipment necessary for a fun day on the fields. Outdoor recreation has Tippmann Custom markers and uses high-pressured Gorilla air tanks. “The guns are easy to maintain and work on, and we purchased an air compressor to generate our own compressed air, which is great be-



cause we don't have to depend on CO2.

Paintball is also being used for combat training and battle simulations, which has been a huge success.

Using the paintball fields and equipment, the United States Army Reserve's newly formed 89th Sustainment Brigade, commanded by Colonel Mikel J. Burroughs, USA, were extensively trained and drilled on small unit tactics.

"The fields provided the guys with a realistic and safe environment to practice these combat situations," Vause points out. "The training was such a success, there are plans to continue using paintball for this purpose."

The base also worked with the Disc Golf Association to set up a 9-hole disc golf course with equipment, and for additional outdoor fun, purchased a large Open Air Cinema screen that is used for functions and video gaming — "which the guys love!" says Vause.

GREAT RESOURCES

With only a staff of four (including Vause), the Outdoor Recreation program has accomplished an astonishing number of projects in a very short time period, providing resources that other bases often do not.

"For example, we have the DeLorme Maps, an atlas that provides regional recreation maps with GPS and topographical locations for all the roads and sites," says Vause. "Plus, it has grid coordinates and a breakdown of all of your camping areas, fishing lakes and hunting, hiking and backpacking areas and trails. We have one for Kansas and a regional set as well."

He points out that another great resource offered is the Ken Burns DVD series called *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. "This is so inspiring and something everyone should see."

"Our plans this year are to continue to develop the recreation site," says Vause. "We want to be an award winning program that provides unique recreational opportunities."

—GRF