

Naval Air Station Whiting Field | 2016 ADC's Installation Excellence Award

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A Spirit of Collaboration That's Easy to See

NAS Whiting Field also enjoys its fair share of the more typical events many communities hold for the installations in their midst, says Capt. Todd Bahlau, NAS Whiting Field's commanding officer. For example, the Santa Rosa County Chamber of Commerce celebrates Military Appreciation Month each year by holding a free picnic, for all 3,000 personnel on base. And local civic organizations have — more than once — built homes for returning local veterans who were disabled during deployments. The county also polls military spouses on their professional experience to see what types of civilian job opportunities the local community can offer.

“Meanwhile, Whiting sailors have logged more than 20,000 volunteer hours in 2015 mentoring youth, coaching kids' sports teams, doing environmental cleanup projects, working with the homeless and low-income veterans,” Bahlau sa

So it's no surprise that NAS Whiting Field won the 2015 USS Bainbridge Award, which recognizes one Navy command each year for community service. Selection for the award is based on competition in five categories: Personal Excellence Partnership, Environmental Stewardship, Project Good Neighbor, Health Safety and Fitness, and Drug Free Workplace. Within its size and type of command category, NAS Whiting Field placed first in two categories and was runner-up in two others.

The installation also has participated in more than 250 community events held by chambers of commerce, military affairs committees, planning boards, CEO roundtables, and education committees, to educate the public about the installation's operations and strategic importance, according to Jim Breitenfeld, Defense Support Initiative manager for the Economic Development Council of Okaloosa County.

But Bahlau and his staff take particular pride in the types of joint military-civilian collaboration that have improved the base's ability to carry out its military mission: flight training involving Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel and a broad range of aircraft, which entails flying about 1.2 million operations annually. He cites as an example of these partnerships, the extensive funding provided, not only by the Navy but through county and state grants to purchase private land surrounding the base to protect its two on-base airfields and 12 outlying landing fields in two states and five counties from

encroachment – a total of 5,500 acres.

The above-mentioned helicopter landing field Escambia County plans for NAS Whiting Field is part of an unprecedented land swap between the two that is authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act. The county will swap land it owns in Santa Rosa County, near the base, on which it will build the landing field. In return, Escambia will take ownership of one of the base's remote landing fields for commercial development.

“Santa Rosa County has been equally instrumental in helping us preserve our flying mission by imposing land development codes that prevent incompatible development underneath existing mission flight tracks,” Bahlau added.

“The importance to our operations of our collaboration with the many civilian communities we work with cannot be overestimated,” he said. “We are fortunate to have found many innovative ways to contribute to and benefit from our presence across several counties in Florida and Alabama as well as generous state-level assistance. We are proud to partner in so many unique and effective ways with many civilian communities to advance our mission while working with them to improve quality of life, both on and off the installation.”

Naval Air Station Whiting Field is the recipient of ADC's 2016 Installation Excellence Award.
