

Architects talk best  
practices for sustainability

Marathon man,  
new city—new achievement

New hires come aboard;  
others retire...

# Omaha Outlook



## IN THIS ISSUE. . .



2

### ARCHITECTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

**District architects talk best practices for sustainability** - Three U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District architects, all providing in-house design for several facilities at Fort Carson, Colorado as part of the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, recently sat down with Northwestern Division Military Construction Program Manager Dave Packard to talk about their projects and the design process. Military construction projects often have unique aspects, a challenge that USACE professionals are eager to address.

### SPOTLIGHT

4

**Last two segments of a four part series continues:** After finishing the Boston Marathon, Joe Chamberlain set his sights on running the New York City Marathon. But, like so many other things, this presented a challenge. Chamberlain gained entry into the New York City Marathon persevered to finish and parallels his race to his career and life lessons.

### SPOTLIGHT



8

**New Hire Sonja Michelsen seeks to Lead** - It's no secret: the federal workforce is chock-full of retirement-eligible employees. Here in the Omaha District, we are not the exception to this rule: half of our workforce could, any day now, pack up shop and ride off into the sunset to enjoy their hard-earned pensioned years. For those employees who may be new to the federal workforce, who are just now embarking upon civil service careers: watching so many "Baby-Boomer" generation leaders retiring, the future seems a bit uncertain. Who will lead? How will they lead? This new engineer has some ideas.

### SPOTLIGHT

10

**PAO Chief retirement; Oldham proud of Corps impact** - There's Bornhoft and Meuleners and Volz and Tillotson, on Ubbelohde and Bedey and Press and Ruch, but do you recall, the most recent commanders of all? Since 1991 Margaret E. Oldham recalls them all, having worked under the previous commanders and the newly-departed Colonel Joel Cross, along with the present commander, Colonel John Henderson. "I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside so many good people at the Corps who look out for one another and also give back to the community," said Oldham.



**On the cover: Sonja Michelsen, Oregon State grad, seeks to lead with compassion. (Photo courtesy of Sonja Michelsen.)**



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District  
1616 Capitol Ave., Suite 9000  
Omaha Neb. 68102

Toll free: (888) 835-5971  
E-mail: [dll-cenwo-pao@usace.army.mil](mailto:dll-cenwo-pao@usace.army.mil)  
Phone: (402) 995-2417  
Fax: (402) 995-2421

Commander: Col. John W. Henderson  
Deputy Commander: Lt. Col. Michael Sexton  
Public Affairs Chief: Maggie Oldham  
Managing Editor: Kevin Quinn

Contributors:  
Al Barrus - Writer/Photographer  
Cheryl Moore - Writer/Photographer  
Eileen Williamson - Writer/Photographer  
Harry Weddington - Photographer  
Jeremy Bell - Design/Layout/Photographer

Omaha Outlook is a quarterly publication produced by the Public Affairs Office for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, in accordance with AR 360-1. This publication is produced for the Omaha District workforce and external audiences including other Corps' districts and stakeholders within the Omaha District's area of responsibility. Content is aimed at highlighting what, why and how the district fulfills its mission.

This publication is available on the district's public website ([www.nwo.usace.army.mil](http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil)) and has a limited print circulation of approximately 500 with distribution in district offices and via U.S. Mail.

Content is prepared in accordance with the Associated Press Stylebook and the Omaha Outlook Style Guide. Contributions are welcomed and highly encouraged. However, the editor reserves the right to make editorial changes to any submitted material as deemed necessary.

The views and opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Army or the U.S. Department of Defense.

# Recharged for the new year

Team,

Please accept my sincere gratitude for all that you have done to make the Omaha District successful during this past year. This year marks the eighth consecutive year that the Omaha District has delivered a \$1 billion plus program, and we anticipate delivering a fiscal year 2016 program in excess of \$1.5 billion. During this time, the size of our workforce has essentially remained steady which indicates that everyone has been working harder and longer to meet our mission requirements. That is a challenge our leaders need to and will address in a deliberate way.



**John W. Henderson**  
Colonel  
Omaha District Commander

As we take some time to reflect on accomplishments this past year, please also take some time to reflect on the contributions of our teammates, the sacrifices that our families have made to accommodate our service, and the support that we have received from a myriad of sources. It is an excellent time to acknowledge and thank our teammates and families, take some well-deserved leave, and attend to our personal resiliency by just taking some down time so that we can start the New Year refreshed, recharged, and ready to deliver a record Fiscal Year 16 program for the Omaha District.

Over the past several months, it has been a great honor to meet most of you and visit the offices, projects, and job sites where you work. Thanks for accommodating these visits, and thanks for your time helping me to better understand the great work that we do for our Nation and the associated challenges that come with the territory. You have taught me many things about our work, and I'd like to share a few of these observations with our workforce, stakeholders and partners:

**1. Command Climate** - Our climate overall is very good, which is key to building strong teams and getting our mission done well. We also have pockets of mistrust and frustration that essentially stem from how we deal with non-performance and consistent enforcement of standards. In response to your feedback during the last command climate survey and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, we are taking a proactive approach to address the most significant issues that negatively impact the effectiveness of our team.

**2. Mega Projects** - We are currently managing two USACE Mega projects - the USSTRATCOM Command and Control Facility in Omaha, Nebraska and the Veterans Affairs Eastern Colorado Health Care System Hospital in Aurora, Colorado. Successfully addressing the complex challenges and resource requirements that come along with these types of projects takes a strong team that is well integrated, vertically and horizontally, internally and externally, working together toward one major goal- successful project completion. There has been some truly heroic work accomplished by our team of teams over these past several months in support of these projects to keep them moving forward; thanks to all of you who have played a part in these actions.

**3. Missouri River Recovery Program** - This extremely important program to promote the recovery of affected ecosystems in the Missouri River Basin presents us with several significant interrelated and ill-defined technical challenges. These solutions are heavily influenced by contradicting authorities, stakeholder advocacy, weather extremes, and industrial development throughout the region. Our team is working exceptionally hard to develop a management plan that complies with the applicable federal laws in a way that achieves balance between the many stakeholder concerns, allows for the exercise of discretion in order to adapt to advances in science, biological response, and weather extremes, and promotes the long-term sustainable use of the Missouri

# OMAHA DISTRICT architects talk best practices for SUSTAINABILITY



Three U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District architects who are providing in-house design for several facilities at Fort Carson, Colorado as part of the 4th Combat Aviation Brigade recently sat down with Northwestern Division Military Construction Program Manager Dave Packard to talk about their projects and the design process.

Each of the district architects, Andy Temeyer, Askelon Parker and Karen Jarvis, have designed projects for several hangars and support facilities at the Butts Army Airfield on Fort Carson. Military construction projects often have unique aspects, a challenge that USACE professionals are eager to address, doing their best to deliver in the most efficient and flexible way possible.

The project architects provided some thoughts on how USACE design teams pride themselves in providing flexibility on even the most challenging projects and designing sustainable facilities for the United States military.

**1. Engage U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Project Delivery Teams.** They are familiar with Federal sustainability concepts, policies, and goals. Tough questions early-on in planning and programming allow designers to plan realistically for design, construction, and operations.

**2. Start as early as possible.** Early or proper planning and programming can yield long-term success during design and construction. Engage all appropriate stakeholders including the Director of Public Works, Base Civil Engineer, Centers of Standardization, etc.

**3. Establish clear goals.** Root all stakeholders in higher-level policies to ensure they reflect the types of facilities that all are being tasked with procuring. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designers can often be the bridge among sometimes difficult challenges.

**4. Coordinate.** Building Information Modeling and energy modeling are good tools to facilitate coordination among design teams. These tools allow designers to essentially construct a facility in Virtual Reality. So much more can be learned about a facility this way.

**5. Iterate.** An iterative design process yields better-tuned, higher performance facilities.

**6. Choose the best design/contracting mechanism for the job.** Not all projects are created equally. Chose the contracting mechanism that has the best potential to yield the intended results within schedule and budget limitations.

**7. Invest in the design process.** Committing to a successful design effort should yield payback throughout the life of the facility. There are so many parallel efforts between the different services, a collaborative investment in a design process can foster shared knowledge and a greater investment in the overall process.

**8. Validate goals.** Throughout the design and construction process, review the project goals to ensure work is focused on these goals. Validation is also beneficial during facility operations such as re-commissioning or retro-commissioning.

# ARCHITECTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

---

**9. Stay engaged.** Design teams should stay engaged as appropriate through construction. Implementing an effective feedback loop that involves all stakeholders including U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters will improve business processes.

**10. Educate facility occupants and operations personnel at turnover.** Proper operations and maintenance ensures a high-performance building stays “tuned” throughout its intended life.



Above: Omaha District architects, Karen Jarvis, Askelon Parker (left) and Andy Temeyer (right) sat down with Northwestern Division Military Construction program manager Dave Packard to talk about design projects at Fort Carson, Colorado. (Omaha District photo by Kevin Quinn).

---

## PERSISTENCE, PATIENCE, INSPIRATION OF MARATHON RUNNING (PART 3)

After finishing the Boston Marathon, Joe Chamberlain set his sights on running the New York City Marathon. But, like so many other things, this presented a challenge.

To qualify for the New York City Marathon, Chamberlain needed to complete a marathon in less than 3 hours 9 minutes, 27 minutes faster than 3:30 required for him to qualify for Boston. His 3:01:01 Boston completion time would qualify him for entry into the New York City Marathon.

The Boston Marathon is not a New York Road Runners Race, which meant Chamberlain was competing for one of a limited number of first-come, first-served, time-qualifier spots available for runners who meet the time standards in non-NYRR Races. Luck was on Chamberlain's side and he gained entry into the race, which is a milestone event for many runners.

On preparing for New York, Chamberlain says he has reached a risky point in his training where injuries are more likely to occur. He ran the Lincoln (Nebraska, National Guard) Marathon in May finishing fourth in his age group with a time of 3:06:58 and says he feels much better but is also at a point where his cardiovascular health is improving ahead of his muscular health.

"If my breathing doesn't slow me down, I like to run hard. It is amazing to run without worrying about pain," said Chamberlain. "Now I'm focused on the marathon, not the sprint'. I don't think everyone truly gets what that means not just in running but in life, work, everything," he added.

Chamberlain described his Boston-qualification race, The Grandmothers Marathon in Duluth, Minnesota.



Above: Success can mistakenly be defined as running the marathon until you crawl across the finish line. I want to finish strong and enjoy every moment of it. On November 1, 2015, Joe Chamberlain finished the New York City Marathon with a time of 3:10:20. (Courtesy photo).

"I trained and prepared. I knew the route and my time goal. I was warned to conserve energy for a stretch called Lemon Drop Hill," he said. "The weather was perfect, I ran easy and was prepared for the hills so, when I got past Lemon Drop Hill, I discovered I had the energy to pick up speed through the end of the race."

"When I retire from the Corps, whenever that is, I want to retire with that same energy," said Chamberlain.

Many people accept challenges or commit to what seems like the right thing at the time but later discover they can't or aren't motivated to finish strong.

"In the back of my mind, I know if I push too hard, and my muscular health isn't on par with my cardiovascular health, I risk getting hurt," said Chamberlain. "If I'm not able to run the marathon then it sticks in my head and my heart that I was only in it for the sprint."

Chamberlain says he's keeping a 3-hour finish in the back of his mind for running the New York City Marathon but is focused on the experience.

"It is a milestone race," he said.

He plans to run Boston again in 2016. "It's not because I didn't beat 3 hours in 2014, although that's probably why I didn't buy a finish line photo. I want to experience a 'normal' Boston Marathon. I ran it in 2014 because the attack was personal. It was probably personal for any runner. In 2014, we took back running and took back Boston's race. In 2014, Boston took back its city. In 2016, I want to experience Boston."

For now, Joe Chamberlain's heart is set on the first weekend in November in New York City.

(continued on page 6)

*"I run  
Because it is the closest thing to freedom I know.  
Free to move. Free to go where I please.  
Free to go fast. Free to go slow. Free to be me.*

*I go fast.  
Maybe not fast for you, but fast for me.  
I love when it is effortless...  
and fast.*

*I run to free stress.  
Drop all my cares.  
Give them to God.  
To cry... to be joyous.*

*I run to defeat my fears.  
To clear my mind  
and free my soul.*

*I run to be with God.  
I feel closer to God when I'm on a long run.  
Closer than any other time or place...*

*Sometimes, when all I can hear is my breathing,  
my heartbeat,  
the wind... and not my thoughts,  
I can feel God's love around me.*

*I run to defeat my fears.  
To clear my mind  
and free my soul.*

*I run to be with God.  
I feel closer to God when I'm on a long run.  
Closer than any other time or place...*

*Sometimes, when all I can hear is my breathing,  
my heartbeat,  
the wind... and not my thoughts,  
I can feel God's love around me.  
In the wind on my skin.*

*I run to have goals.  
To have purpose.*

*I run for a challenge...  
To test my limits.  
To see how good I can be.*

*I don't run because it makes me better than you,  
I run because it makes me better than me,  
better than I was.  
To be free.  
To be me."*

*-- Joe Chamberlain*



## *PERSISTENCE, PATIENCE, INSPIRATION OF MARATHON RUNNING* (PART4)

On November 1, 2015, Joe Chamberlain finished the New York City Marathon with a time of 3:10:20.

His advice to himself upon leaving Omaha was simply “finish strong”.

Little did he know what that would mean. Within the first mile of the race, while crossing the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, a runner leapt down from the sidewalk kicking Chamberlain in the left calf.

“The kick caused my calf to cramp up,” said Chamberlain. “At mile 4, it hurt so badly, I thought I was going to have to quit. I was so upset. I thought I was going to have to get a DNF (did not finish), early into the marathon.”

The cramping let up at about mile 8 and he kept running.

Lessons from running aren’t too different from the advice Chamberlain gives students in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Pathways program, which brings college students to work temporarily for the Corps.

People, work, life, whatever it may be, things happen to trip a person up, the perseverance to push through is what gives the lessons to learn from. “We’ve only lost when we quit,” said Chamberlain.

He says one of the best pieces of career advice one of his mentors gave him was pursue a job because it’s your passion, not for a pay raise.

Chamberlain says engineering design is his passion, as is running. “If I finish strong, I can keep running. If I push myself to the point of exhaustion, I have nowhere to go,” said Chamberlain. “I’ve been encouraged to consider other jobs with the Corps but I love design. I want



to do the designing not review someone else's work."

When Chamberlain came to work for the Omaha District in 1983, he says there were about 30 electrical engineers in the organization. After downsizing in the 1990s, the number of electrical engineers in the Omaha District dropped to 15.

The races he ran were limited to the Corporate Cup races for a few years in the 1990s.

He says after 9/11, his workload increased tremendously but the workforce didn't increase with it.

"I was regularly working nights and weekends and traveling what felt like everywhere," said Chamberlain. "That's the same time I took off from running competitively. I still ran, but to burn off stress and enjoy the outdoors. It wasn't just for me and I wasn't running for my health."

Eating healthy and exercising regularly was more difficult with frequent and prolonged travel. "It can be done, but you have to commit to it," said Chamberlain. "On the other hand, collaborative learning and decision making takes place when groups traveling together sit down for a meal."

Aiming for a beneficial work/life balance means not letting work get in the way of a workout.

"When I began entering races again in 2013, I realized I'm reaching a point where I can no

longer make up for lost health," he said. "I started looking at health as a savings account."

Missed workouts happen, but long breaks from regular exercise or a decline in overall fitness is like carrying an ever-increasing balance on your credit card.

"If I compromise my health on a bigger paycheck, I risk spending the additional earning later in life on medical bills," said Chamberlain.

"I don't want to take more than three pills a day for an ailment I caused because I didn't take care of myself. My dad worked every day until he died. He loved what he did but I want work to give me the rest of my life, not the opposite. Whenever I retire, I plan to enjoy it. Medication for something I could have prevented, is loan on my health I can never pay back."

"I can lose myself designing an electrical system," said Chamberlain. "I can spend hours on a design project and find great satisfaction knowing my work is appreciated by project managers who ask to work with me. I find great reward in mentoring electrical engineers in our Pathways program. We should be preparing our replacements. Not everyone will be the next great leader but we should all come to work to do our best."

Chamberlain even provided a little mentoring during the New York City Marathon. While crossing

the long steep Queensboro Bridge, he passed a young woman who was faltering and softly crying.

"I asked if she was okay and if she was cramping up," said Chamberlain. She said no, but she was exhausted and doubted she could make it.

He ran with her a while, told her she could and would make it, told her to slow down and walk through the water stops. He told her to ignore her watch and look around at the sights. Then, ever an engineer, he reminded her of the great sights ahead of her: the buildings in Manhattan, Queens,



Above: Chamberlain pushed through to the finish, despite the cramping calf pain he felt with every hill climb during his first 8 miles and slowing to help another runner. "We owe it to each other to slow down and reach out a hand to one another. I hope with all my heart that she made it to the finish line. I'll always believe she did." (Courtesy photo).

# New Hire **Sonja Michelsen** Seeks to **Lead** with Compassion

It's no secret: the federal workforce is chock-full of retirement-eligible employees. Here in the Omaha District, we are not the exception to this rule: half of our workforce could, any day now, pack up shop and ride off into the sunset to enjoy their hard-earned pensioned years.

For those employees who may be new to the federal workforce, who are just now embarking upon civil service careers: watching so many "Baby-Boomer" generation leaders retiring, the future seems a bit uncertain.

Who will lead? How will they lead? It's a daunting prospect which seems to put the organization on shaky ground. What will happen when they leave? What if they all retire at the same time? What will the organization look like?

Eventually, everyone has to retire. However, there is hope on the horizon.

In this article we intend to feature what the future holds: a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District employee from the other end of the career spectrum. New-hire: Sonja Michelsen started working here in October 2015. She graduated from high school in 2011 in El Paso, Texas, and she came to Omaha fresh out of college: a 2015 graduate of Oregon State University's Ecological Engineering Bachelor of Science program.

This Texan-turned-Oregonian was born in Wyoming and grew up in El Paso, however she has family roots not far from Omaha. Though the

Midwest is new to her personally, her mother grew up on a farm in western Iowa.

As Sonja was getting close to graduation time and considering career options, several of her engineering professors recommended she look into working for USACE. She visited USA Jobs and applied to a civil-engineering position in Omaha for the Hydraulics Section of the Hydrology Branch.

While Sonja is new to the workforce and to this organization, she's confident about moving up and eventually leading others in the workplace.

"I came here because I want to learn how water moves and how we manage it, and the science behind it," Michelsen said. "I want to learn what's going on in the other sections and cross train. I would like to learn everyone's name. I would like to serve this organization and potentially move up."

Sonja's co-workers and mentors have all confirmed that she would make a great leader. She's confident, compassionate and outgoing. A member of the new "Millennial" generation: they are Americans born between 1982 and 2004. According to The Atlantic Magazine, they are being called "The Next Great Generation."

What type of leadership style can be expected from this new generation? According to a U.S. News & World Report article "What Kind of Leaders Are Millennials?" Writer Hannah Morgan says that 91 percent of millennials are interested in leading, and of the 91 percent seeking leadership responsibilities, more than half are women. Millennials want to help



Above: New hire, Civil Engineer Sonja Michelsen is an Oregon State University Ecological Engineering Graduate. (Omaha District photo by Jeremy Bell).

others succeed. The top reason millennials want to become leaders is to empower others, while only five percent say money and one percent claim to want power.

The positive consensus on this up-and-coming generation is that the millennials' approach to a more compassionate leadership-style is their trademark, and they are known for their desires to align themselves with social causes. They also want to work for companies that are giving back to society. "They want to do meaningful work that enables them to make an impact at their company and in the world," according to U.S. News.

That is why Sonja Michelsen came to the Omaha District.

"I really like the Corps' focus on the general public, rather than just a single client. This organization serves a much larger community. I appreciate that

mind-set," Michelsen said. And what about social causes? "One thing I'm hoping to get into: increasing women and minorities in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields especially since I'm actually an engineer now."

A co-worker confirmed Michelsen not only has a lot of potential, but she also has a strong work-ethic. "She's very self-motivated. She's been updating cross sections for us: staring at lines on a computer screen all day would drive most people crazy. But she keeps trucking on," said Hydraulic Engineer Ben Lorenzen of Omaha District's Hydrology Branch.

What about Army Values? Does she embody the organization's values? "Yes. Two that stand out," according to Lorenzen "Duty: She works hard and she doesn't take short cuts. Something like the cross section work, where you're doing the same process over and over again: if a person were to make a mistake early on it would be easy to just ignore the

(continued on page 16)

[www.nwo.usace.army.mil](http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil)

# PAO Chief retires

## Oldham proud of Corps impact

There's Bornhoft and Meuleners and Volz and Tillotson, on Ubbelohde and Bedey and Press and Ruch, but do you recall, the most recent commanders of all?

Since 1991 Margaret E. Oldham recalls them all, having worked under the previous commanders and the newly-departed Colonel Cross along with the present commander, Colonel John Henderson.

Not only has she worked under 10 commanders, she has been under the supervision of two Kevins, Mayberry and Quinn, Paul Johnston, and three lieutenant colonels, Jordano, Martinez and Sexton.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside so many good people at the Corps who look out for one another and also give back to the community, through Operation Santa, the Paint-A-Thon and individually through other causes on their own time," said Oldham.


Oldham's own time begins January 1, 2016. Following 30 plus years in the federal civilian service she is retiring from the force, as another "force awakens".

This Omaha native earned her Bachelor of Science in journalism at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. She began her career as an intern reporter for the Council Bluffs, IA Nonpariel newspaper during her college years. In 1978 she put her college aspirations on hold and married her husband Tom. A year later Tom joined the Air Force and Maggie joined him at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas where she worked at the Base Exchange wrapping expensive gifts during the Christmas holidays. "Very humbling when married to an airman basic and being strapped for cash ourselves," she said.

It is during this time of year that Oldham reflects on what she has had, and how far she has come. Their first military assignment was to Rhein Main Air Base, Germany in 1980. "We were actually

hoping that his first assignment would bring us either closer to home, like in Colorado or on the East Coast," she said. "But it turned out to be a turning point for us, a very good move and one that would define our life forward," she added.

Their humble beginnings as a young couple in the military reflect what so many young couples endure even today: They didn't have a car for the first six



Above: Maggie Oldham, Public Affairs Chief, Omaha District enjoying one of many Corps Days during her career at the Omaha District. (Photo by Harry Weddington).

months, then picked up a Volkswagen bug, but it was on its last tires. Two years later the tires held out, but the battery caught on fire putting an end to the bug. Bicycles became their mode of transportation going back and forth from their efficiency apartment they rented from a German family. “We lived in town and I remember having to adjust the pictures on the wall now and then, because we lived only a block from the Bahnhof (train station),” she said.

In June 1981 Oldham began her civil service career in Rhein Main in the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division as a GS-3 clerk typist and received a GS-4 promotion before it was time to pack up and head to a new duty station. With a few more moves and career changes, Oldham continued to reach for her ultimate goal of mixing her journalism talents with her love for working with the government.

“My goal upon returning to the states was to go back to school and finish my college degree, then I could combine my journalism and government work somehow,” she said. What made it much easier for her was the surprise her husband received when they got orders to Offutt Air Force Base.

They left Germany in October 1989. “At the time the Berlin Wall was coming down and we had just visited the city that July, so it was an interesting perspective to hear the news,” Oldham said.

They returned to Omaha where Oldham was glad to be back home in her hometown. “But we missed Germany after being there for almost seven years,” she said. She also wanted to add how much patriotism one feels when they are living outside of the U. S. and see the American flag raised or hear the national



Monique Farmer (left), Kevin Quinn (center) and Maggie Oldham were all smiles the day the Commander recognized and “coined” them at a staff meeting. (Photo by Harry Weddington).

anthem played, as they did during various functions at the bases in Germany.

---

***“It really makes you proud to be an American and to respect the members of the military. I feel grateful that I had the opportunity to witness that and to support the military as an Air Force civilian employee,” she said.***

---

Two months after returning to Omaha she was embarking on her educational goal at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in the communications program and reached that goal when she received her B.S. in Communications in 1991, with a minor in Psychology. With Offutt AFB in the midst of a reduction in force, Oldham worked for the Bellevue Leader newspaper during the summer.

The Corps door opened for her in October 1991! She began as a secretary in the Environmental Branch of the Engineering Division where she remained excited about her opportunity. When she saw a news item about a freelance writer for the base newspaper at Offutt, she applied and began her writing career, while concurrently working for the Corps.

“Everyone has a story if you are willing to sit down and talk to them. My stories were always about people, but also their passion for whatever the story was about,” she said. Oldham said that you never know what life will throw at you, but it’s amazing how things turn out.

And turn out, they did. In 1995 though the Omaha District was going through a downsizing, Oldham was tipped off that a Public Affairs Officer position may become available. “Kevin Quinn will remember that I called him on lunch hour from a phone booth that used to be in the Zorinsky building in 1995,” she chuckled.

Her freelance writing paid huge dividends. The executive officer who hired her picked up the weekly *Air Pulse* newspaper and was very familiar with Oldham’s journalistic skills. In March 1995 she transferred to the Public Affairs Office and ironically had to give up her freelance work for the *Air Pulse*.



# SPOTLIGHT

Her humble beginnings as an editorial clerk, which eventually led to her promotion through the years to a GS-11 Public Affairs Specialist in 1998 cemented her dream and goals as she had planned.

With many awards, recognitions, a master's degree from UNO in public administration and much earned respect, Oldham moved up the career ladder to a GS-12 Public Affairs position with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Nebraska Western Iowa Health Care System. Her two-year career as the Deputy Public Affairs Officer there allowed her to be involved in the National Veterans Wheelchair games. "I was there during the H1N1 flu when the first case in the Omaha area was at the VA and I launched a communication plan to address it," she said.

And now to her final chapter: "The happiest day of my federal career was when I found out I had been selected for the GS-13 Chief of Public Affairs for the Omaha District," she recalled.

Oldham returned to the Omaha District in January 2011. And like the saying goes be careful what you wish for. Oldham received a welcome back like none other with the 2011 Missouri River Flood. A Public Affairs "Gold Mine" when you're dealing with the Public, the Stakeholders, and informing the media.

"I returned to the place that felt like home," she said. "The true impact we have on people's lives, livelihood, and quality of life is what motivates me as a Public Affairs professional," she concluded.

As the 30 plus career for Oldham comes to an end New

Year's Eve, she continues to take that proactive approach to life as she prepares for family, friends, and possibly "freelancing it a lot".



(continued from page 7)



Above: On Sept. 19, 1994, 119 USACE employees and family members participated in the Corporate Cup 10k in downtown Omaha. Joe Chamberlain was the top finisher for the USACE team with a time off 33:28. Chamberlain finished 8th overall. (Photo by Bob Etzel).

and Brooklyn and Central Park and the finish. He said the crowd would carry her.

“I got her to promise me she would see it through. Then I wished her my best and went on,” said Chamberlain. “It haunts me that I didn’t get her race number. I’ll always believe she finished.”

“My time during that mile was 8:55. I’ve never run that slowly in a race. It horrified me at first, but it was worth it. I couldn’t pass her and ignore her. I hope with all my heart that she made it to the finish line. I’ll always believe she did. We owe it to each other to slow down and reach out a hand to one another.”

Chamberlain pushed through to the finish, despite the cramping calf pain he felt with every hill climb during his first 8 miles and slowing to help another runner.

Chamberlain has found a pretty good life/work balance.

After the race, he and his wife walked around New York City, went to Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral and enjoyed dinner together.

“I’ve run the Boston Marathon and the New York City Marathon,” said Chamberlain. “For runners,

they’re dream races. Some don’t understand banking for the future rather than banking on the future. Success can mistakenly be defined as running the marathon until you crawl across the finish line. I want to finish strong and enjoy every moment of it.”

As Chamberlain reached the south end of Central Park, the noise went from deafening silence to a deafening roar from the crowd. “I couldn’t believe I was there,” he said. “Their cheers echoed off the buildings. They really did carry runners to the finish, I wanted to keep running as soon as I saw the buildings and heard them. Usually, the last 3 miles are tough but those 3 miles were fantastic and I’ve won races.”

Chamberlain is already registered to run the Boston Marathon in 2016. His finish in the NYC Marathon qualified him for 2016, which he is contemplating as well.

## *Engineers Week*

Feb. 21-27

Founded by NSPE in 1951, EWeek is dedicated to ensuring a diverse, well-educated future engineering workforce by increasing understanding of and interest in engineering and technology careers.

- See more at:

<http://www.nspe.org/resources/partners-and-state-societies/national-engineers-week#sthash.f5WZdyIr.dpuf>



# MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDER

(continued from page 1)

River and the purposes for which it was authorized. Kudos to our teammates who are working on this amazingly difficult, yet rewarding program.

**4. Hydropower** - Our critical hydropower infrastructure is quickly reaching the end of its design life at a time when national budget constraints make it difficult to perform the major rehabilitation to our power plants required over the next several years. Therefore, we have established a team to develop a strategic master plan that will guide future programming and funding, to include increased customer funding for all hydropower sustainment, rehabilitation, and modernization requirements in a way that provides predictability and maximizes efficiencies to ensure that long-term resilience and reliability of this critical National infrastructure. Our desired end state is to ensure that Omaha District hydropower infrastructure is rehabilitated and modernized no later than calendar year 2035 in order to maximize resilience and provide renewable, reliable energy production to the Nation for an additional 50 years.

**5. Leader Development** - Strategically, this is one of the most important programs that we run, and it takes a significant investment of time and resources by the district to support this program, and a huge amount of initiative by our participants to get the most out of it. The intent of our LDP is to identify a diverse pool of potential future leaders and develop their leadership and management skills through a one-year, multi-faceted program which includes classroom exercises, interface with senior leaders exposure to university classes, District and Regional Business Center staff meetings, budget discussions and Project Review Board meetings. Concurrently, Leadership Development Program participants develop a mentoring relationship with a senior leader, participate in self-assessment of personality, strengths, leadership and management styles, as well as, participate in class projects. Congratulations to all of 2015 graduates, and thanks to the support team, mentors, and supervisors that enabled their success.

As you all know, there is so much going on in the large and diverse district for which we can all be proud. The key initiatives listed above are provided as an update to all because they influence almost every part of our District in some way. Thank you for what you do every day to contribute to the Omaha District mission accomplishment.

Amy and I send our sincere wishes to all of you for a productive and happy new year. We look forward to serving with you in 2016.

Essayons,



(continued from page 9 )

mistake and continue, however Sonja is the type of person who, if she knows something feels wrong, or she sees something that she thinks might be wrong, she is very eager to ask questions and take notes so she gets it right.



locked into a room to complete puzzles together as a sort of spontaneous problem-solving and team-building exercise.

Jess Thacker was at that activity. She's the Director of Youth Programming at First United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska. She also spoke highly of Ms. Michelsen. "Sonja has a confident presence and maturity far beyond her years. She's compassionate, intelligent, and very interested in making the world a better/safer place." Thacker said.

"The thing I was most impressed with was how she jumped right in looking for clues and problem solving. We did this the very first night we met her. It can be intimidating taking initiative in a new group, but Sonja showed no fear. New in town, recent graduate, joining a group of young professionals (some 10-13 years her senior)--again, she is very confident!"

Sonja is still very new to Omaha and the Midwest. However, she came very highly recommended. Her participation in the United Methodist Church was also strong when she was an engineering student in Oregon.

"And her integrity: She seems to have a pretty firm base of who she is. She doesn't get nervous

in social settings. That's a trait she represents well," Lorenzen said, speaking all praise of his new co-worker. "Something really amazing: she's more adept at finding social events around Omaha than I am and I was born and raised here. She's very resourceful and I think that will be a great benefit to the Corps."

An experience that Ben Lorenzen mentioned was an extra-curricular activity where she went to a building, and along with a group of strangers, was

Rev. Timothy Stover, Campus Minister for United Campus Ministry at Oregon State University, wrote all praise of Omaha District's new engineer.

"Sonja is a fun, creative, outgoing, reliable person who is also balanced in her ability to be serious, disciplined, and frivolously spontaneous ... she helps to create and to lead in new directions," said Rev. Stover in an e-mail talking about Michelsen.

"She revived the Student Leadership Council for our campus ministry and served as president. She is willing to have high expectations of others and helps to hold them accountable for the responsibilities they accept. In my decades of work

Above: Throughout college, Sonja Michelsen volunteered with Engineers Without Borders, which included a 2013 trip to Kenya to help oversee the implementation of a bore-hole well. Photo submitted by Sonja Michelsen. (Courtesy photos).

# SPOTLIGHT

with young adults, Sonja stands significantly above her peers in this regard,” The Reverend continued.

“Faith and spirituality are what ground Sonja ... they provide a significant context through which her leadership took root and matured. The community has shaped Sonja in significant ways ... so that she’s now contributing back to the larger community of faith (including to persons of other faith/religious/spiritual communities...

“I/we will miss her more immediate presence in our campus ministry community and I trust that you all will benefit from your wisdom in hiring her.”

The Omaha District is happy to have Sonja on the team. But what about long-term plans: Does she like the area? “I don’t have family here, however, my mother grew up in northwest Iowa so I have some history in the area. I have a boyfriend: he’s finishing up school in Oregon, and I’m working on selling him on the Midwest.”

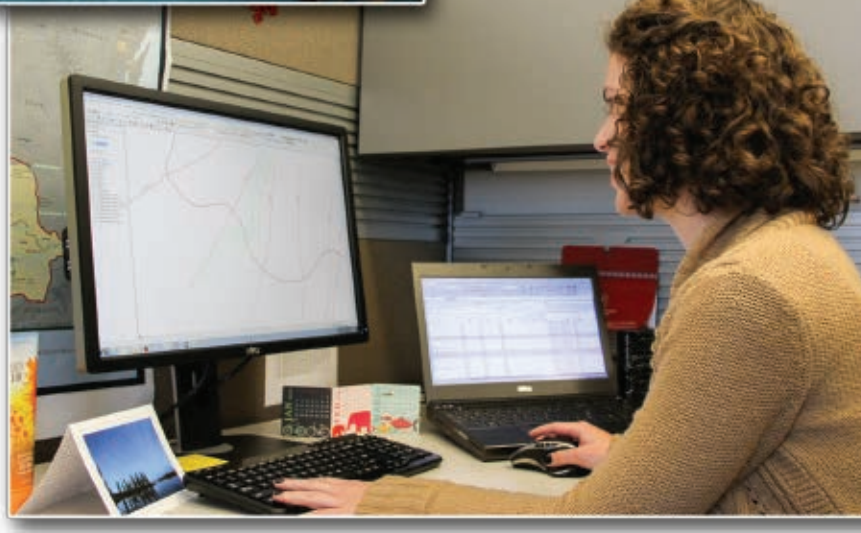
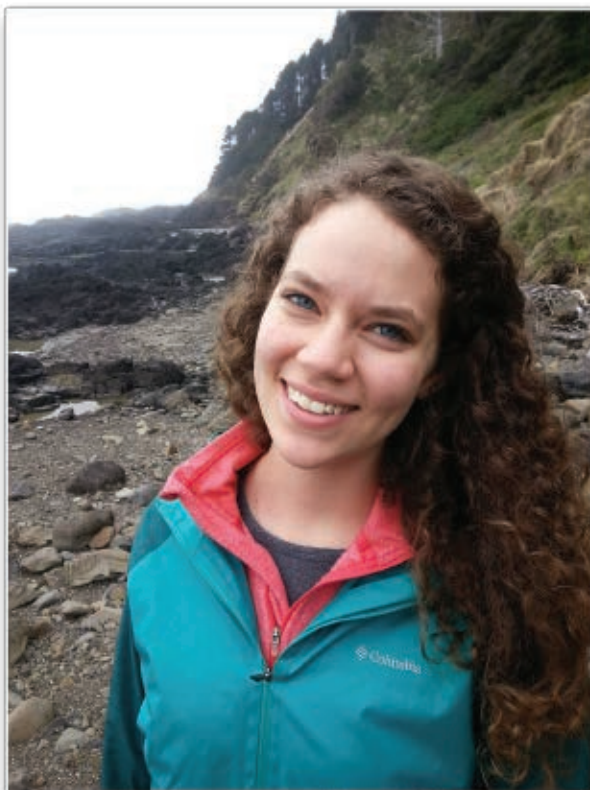
Sonja likes to go hiking and camping and has already hiked Fontenelle Forest. She enjoys getting outdoors not just in the local area, but also as a world traveler. She’s been to India and Africa for work projects. She volunteered for the non-governmental

organization Engineers Without Borders, and also volunteered in Kenya during that time.

“I was involved with Engineers Without Borders throughout my undergraduate career, serving as chair for events, coordinator of educational opportunities and president. We worked on projects to improve access and quality of drinking water. For a month in 2013, I was in Kenya to help oversee implementation of a bore-hole well,” Michelsen added.

She also spent a week north of New Delhi, India, as part of an undergraduate research project on flooding in the south Asian sub-continent.

The future is bright for this confident young engineer. While she works on getting her boyfriend to come out to the Midwest, she is enjoying cooking, listening to podcasts on the subjects of science and social studies, she goes hiking and volunteers for social justice initiatives.



Top: Civil Engineer Sonja Michelsen studied ecological engineering in the Pacific Northwest where she enjoyed hiking outdoors in the Cascade Mountain range. Photo submitted by Sonja Michelsen (Courtesy photo) Bottom: Sonja works hard at her desk. (Omaha District photo by Jeremy Bell).



1616 Capitol Ave., Ste. 9000  
Omaha, NE 68102

**BUILDING STRONG®**

**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
Omaha District

Elf, Santa, Elvis and Omaha District singers embarked on their annual Operation Santa, in the spirit of giving to our less-fortunate communities.



Santa meets his match at the Omaha District Operation Santa event at Glenwood and Douglas County this past holiday season.