

Learning from a 100-year-old Partnership

Rockaway Township and Picatinny Arsenal have accomplished much more together than they ever could have going it alone

By Michael G. Dachisen, Mayor & Joseph S. Fiorilla, Community Services Director, Rockaway Township

Rockaway Township is the largest community by total area in Morris County, covering more than 45 square miles. Over 6,000 acres of the township is dedicated to the U.S. Army Picatinny Arsenal. The original settlement of Rockaway, then a part of Pequannock Township, dates back to the early 18th Century. The area was used for iron mining and blast furnaces that produced various colonial iron products, including ammunition used by the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

Some of those early mine workings were on land that is now part of Picatinny Arsenal. Through the years, the footprint of the Arsenal expanded to its current size, with the mission primarily focusing on research and development of weapons systems that use cutting edge technologies. Rockaway Township is very proud to be home to 80 percent Picatinny Arsenal's land. The township and the Arsenal have enjoyed a close working relationship for essential services for over a century, long before the idea of local shared services became fashionable.

Though small by comparison to other military facilities located around the country, the magnitude of Picatinny's presence in Rockaway Township, in geographic size, population and mission, cannot be overstated. The Arsenal currently employs approximately 5,000 civilians, and 150 Army service personnel. The U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and allied foreign military liaisons also have staff assigned to Picatinny. The Picatinny Garrison, commanded by Lt. Colonel Ingrid Parker, is responsible for base operations including infrastructure, contract management and support to soldiers and their families.

Mutual Aid Some of earliest relationships between the township and arsenal began with basic services such as Police and Fire mutual aid agreements decades ago. Today, the Township Police Department provides additional surveillance and support to the base security force. The Fire Department also maintains a mutu-



Frog Falls Aquatic Park opened during the summer of 2000 to enormous acclaim and still operates today, incorporating surrounding communities under a partnered agreement. In this 2007 photo, former Garrison Commander Lt. Col. John Stack poses with Kermit the Frog and Rockaway Township Business Administrator Greg Poff.

100-year-old Partnership

al aid agreement. In turn, Picatinny will assist neighboring communities as they are able. In particular, the Arsenal has a well-trained and equipped hazardous materials response unit. They have responded to incidents not only in Rockaway but throughout Morris County.

Health and Security The township's Division of Health has historically worked very closely with the arsenal on numerous levels, primarily augmenting Arsenal health programs for soldiers and their families. Township health officials worked with the Arsenal after September 11, 2001 to plan for a "Point of Distribution" (POD) program, should circumstances require the rapid distribution of medications to the public. Picatinny health officials also participate in regional health management meetings, networking with local health officials to discuss essential services and trends.

Educating the Children of Military Families Rockaway also enjoys the privilege of educating K-12 students from Picatinny, as the township is the sending district for children residing at the arsenal. The arsenal provides a liaison to work closely with school officials, ensuring the best possible education to families who are often in transition due to military service rotation requirements. Picatinny also works with the township library on numerous initiatives, including streamlined registration for military families. All assigned active

duty families at Picatinny—regardless of the municipality in which they reside—are welcome at Rockaway's Library. The township also recently supported a book drop station at its municipal building as a fundraiser for military families.

Playing Fields The most celebrated partnership is between Rockaway Township's Division of Parks and Recreation and Picatinny Arsenal Family Morale Welfare and Recreation (FMWR). It began with the shared use of four athletic fields inside the Arsenal. FMWR had seen a decrease in the use of some recreational facilities due to an aging workforce and mounting maintenance costs. Picatinny offered the township the use of the fields for recreation programs in exchange for maintenance support. Rockaway has gained valuable field opportunities, while the FMWR was able to realize savings. At the time, no one realized the importance of this partnership and the positive impact it would have in the ensuing years.

Roller Hockey The success of the athletic field agreement soon expanded to include the use of an outdoor asphalt play area at Picatinny. The township's new roller hockey program lacked an adequate play surface, and after brief negotiations, another partnership was born. Picatinny offered a number of summer swimming pool memberships to the township. The existing pool was aging, base memberships were declining


and FMWR incurred the expense of maintaining this asset. As with prior collaborations, this partnership proved mutually beneficial.

Construction of an Aquatic Park Based on these early successes, the township and arsenal began exploring the construction of a new shared aquatic facility—a showcase operation that neither community could build individually. Frog Falls Aquatic Park opened during the summer of 2000 to enormous acclaim and still operates today, incorporating surrounding communities under a partnered agreement. Cooperation at this level for such a partnership had never previously been achieved between a local government and the military. Most of the original partnerships between Rockaway Township and Picatinny Arsenal continue to this day—a testament to the resourcefulness and commitment of our leaders and constituents.

U.S. Family Covenant The U.S. Army maintains a Family Covenant supporting the service men and women and their families at the local level. Rockaway Township was proud to join with every municipality in Morris County to sign the U.S. Army Family Covenant. As the longstanding host community to Picatinny Arsenal, the township understands the commitment and value the military installation brings not only to our community, specifically, but to the region in general. Community partnerships have enabled and enhanced our capability to provide a quality of life for soldiers and their families commensurate with the dedication of their service to our country. Partnerships have enabled Picatinny to continue use of previously compromised facilities and mitigated escalating maintenance costs that would have resulted in the elimination of programming. These groundbreaking collaborations resulted in the construction and use of a world class water park that would not otherwise be possible for a place like Picatinny, nor for Rockaway Township. Partnerships have been sustained and nurtured, enabling the township and Arsenal to make the Army's Community Covenant a reality in deed and in practice. ♣

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