

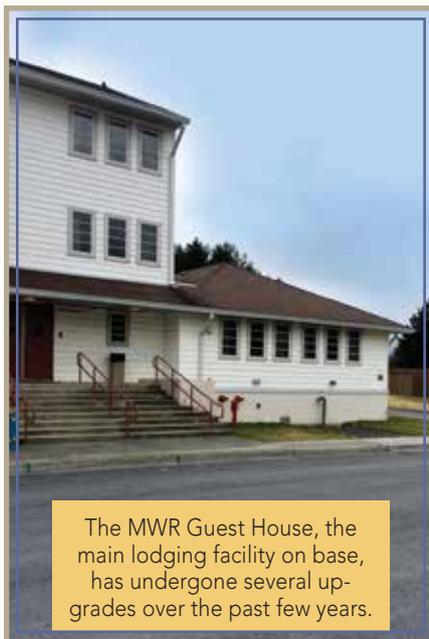
## KODIAK, ALASKA, OFFERS *Award-Winning Programs*

**A**t U.S. Coast Guard Base Kodiak, Alaska, Morale, Well-Being and Recreation (MWR) programs, facilities and activities are the lifeline that help service members and their families make it through long, grueling winters, and summers where rainstorms can last for weeks on end. The MWR team at Kodiak understands the importance of these quality of life benefits, and was recognized in 2013 by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) as a finalist for the NRPA Gold Medal Award in the Armed Forces Recreation category.

“Overall, I think the whole idea behind the award for us, and even to compete for the award, was the total involvement of all of MWR and the entire staff,” said MWR Director Joe Bower. “For instance, when it came to the essay questions, I tried to tie in as many of my staff at the different MWR facilities and programs that we have, including on the engineering side, when we were gathering the information and consolidating it into the essays to come up with the best possible answer to their questions. Linda Pena [MWR programs manager] was very good at documenting the process in the system for us, which was helpful because we could bring all of the info together and review it, and then give it to our commander, who assisted in the final review. It was a real team effort all around, and that was the whole idea behind the process for us.”

The MWR staff is able to offer the Kodiak community vitally important MWR facilities, including the recently renovated MWR Guest House; Northern Lights Recreation Center; bowling center; movie theater; softball field; outdoor horseshoe, batting-cage and Frisbee-golf areas; a running trail with outdoor exercise equipment that goes around the Kodiak peninsula; an auto hobby shop popular with single service members; gazebos and picnic areas; a golf course/clubhouse; a boat house attached to the docks that features a crab cooker/steamer shelter, which is a cleaning and steaming station for all the fish or crabs that are caught; and the Golden Anchor Banquet Room and Sports Pub, a two-story building with the sports pub area upstairs and a banquet room downstairs that can host functions for up to 225 people. “We have a kitchen in the back, and we do our own catering for special functions,” noted Bower.

In order to stay on top of the latest trends, and tap into resources and ideas from fellow armed forces recreation professionals, Kodiak MWR works closely with the Armed Forces Recreation Network (AFRN) and NRPA, for training and other guidance. The Boys and Girls Club of America (Armed Forces Section) is also an important source for training and support. “The Boys and Girls Club offers us a lot of opportunities and grants, and we have the ability to teach our youth using their programs,” noted Pena. “Last year they brought \$7,500 worth



The MWR Guest House, the main lodging facility on base, has undergone several upgrades over the past few years.

of free toys to us from the Toy Giveaway Foundation, and we had a big event in the hangar with a BBQ, and gave away the toys to the kids.”

### IMPROVED LODGING

Although funding is tight, MWR has been able to realize some key facility improvements and renovations, including several updates at the MWR Guest House, which is the main lodging facility at Kodiak.

“The MWR Guest House is a beautiful, rustic-themed lodging facility,” said Lodging Facility Manager Peggy Pies. “The primary goal of the Guest House is to provide temporary quarters for active duty and civilian personnel on orders, military members on leave and sponsored guests.”

The MWR Guest House has three floors with 46 rooms, which contain either one double bed or two twins, as well as three family suites and three suites with a sitting room. Two handicapped accessible rooms are also available with wheelchair accessibility. “In FY09, furniture in all rooms was changed to log furniture and dressed with new handmade quilts,” noted Pies.

Each room has private baths supplied with basic amenities including hairdryers, coffee pots, a phone, new 40-inch LCD TVs with cable television, and a refrigerator. Wireless Internet is available on three floors. Guest lounges, fully equipped kitchens and laundry facilities are available on each floor. Centrally located on the first floor is a spacious playground for children of guests. The Guest House also offers a gift shop.

“In FY10 we upgraded our lobby to leather loveseats and chairs to complete the rustic theme,” Pies explained. “Each lounge on the three floors has new 52-inch LCD TVs. In FY10 we purchased the remainder of the log furniture needed to upgrade our second- and third-floor lounges. Our next upgrade is to change out the art with an Alaskan theme.”

To ensure the highest quality of service and to exceed customer expectations, the Guest House employs a staff of 10-14 to maintain the building year round. Housekeeping is available Monday through Friday and front office staff is available 24 hours per day. During slow seasons in late fall and early winter, staff is cut back to a minimum, allowing the facility to meet or exceed the current year’s projected financial goals.

“Formerly a World War II building, the Guest House underwent major renovations that were started in 1998 and completed in 1999; however, interior enhancements were never finished,” noted Pies. “We continuously enhance the facility with new furnishings.”

Pies said the long-term readiness goal is to create and maintain an atmosphere that is not only appealing to guests, but also comfortable and convenient for them as well. “Word of mouth has been our best advertisement in the past and

# COAST GUARD LODGING/MWR



The newly renovated MWR Guest House offers 46 rooms, and each features single and double beds with new handmade quilts, pictured here, sporting an Alaskan wilderness theme.

continues to be today,” she said. “To improve upon that and gain a larger percentage of all transferring military personnel, MWR created a website that is designed for the incoming member to view while obtaining a general idea of what MWR has to offer, and the type of service he or she can expect when using any of the MWR facilities. Our employees strive to ensure that all potential customers view their visit to Kodiak as a memorable one.”

## FACILITY UPDATES

In addition to the upgrades at the MWR Guest House, MWR has been able to add four additional remote sites to the RV Park, which also features fire pits that were purchased through Belson Outdoors. MWR plans on adding more sites to the park this year as well. Over the past few years the base has also completed several other projects, including renovating the scoring shack and softball field, and putting in a new gym floor at the Northern Lights Recreation Center on base, which houses the pool, racquetball courts, basketball courts, strength and cardio areas, a multipurpose room and a rock wall in the gym area.

“Everything is tied into our Northern Lights Recreation Facility, which is our main facility here on base,” noted Bower.

Another big project for MWR was the installation of a digital camera at the movie theater in 2013. “That was a \$135,000 project that we paid for with our NAF earnings in order to keep our movie theater digital and match the Navy Motion Picture Program,” noted Bower. “We switched out from reel-to-reel, and we now have 3D capability, so that was a huge improvement for us, and we realized that through our earnings. When you say \$135,000, that is not a lot in terms of a DoD facility, but, for us, that is a huge chunk out of our bank.”

## MWR PROGRAMS

One of the events that makes this MWR program so special is its annual Eco Challenge, a long-distance team endurance/adventure race that has grown tremendously popular since it began 13 years ago.

“It is an amazing event to put on, and one that a lot of people look forward to,” noted MWR Business Chief Rachael Dyer. “Because it is such a big event with so many teams and volunteers, it is one of the greatest MWR achievements that we have here, especially with our weather and locale.”

Pena added, “We have also been fortunate to have USO

shows here, and we were lucky enough to have Gary Sini’s Lt. Dan Band twice, Sesame Street twice, and we used to get Armed Forces Entertainment, until funding was shifted to support troops overseas.”

“The importance of the MWR programs involves providing for the families here, such as with our youth activities, and our Boys and Girls Club, which falls underneath Linda,” noted Bower. “We do special things for the families, such as with our Winter Wonderland, where we take the entire pool and first floor of our gym building and convert it into a Santa House, so kids can line up to visit Santa. We also create, using cardboard and other supplies, holiday scenes and themes in the pool, based on Disney movies or characters, for example.”

“For the Month of the Military Child, each facility will have a special,” added Bower. “Like, for example, a free ice cream at the pizza parlor, or red pin bowling at the bowling center, or a free showing at the movie theater. We do something every day of the month, and it culminates at the end of the month with our big Spring Fling event, which has inflatables, face painting, a BBQ and other family-friendly events and activities.”

For the outdoors enthusiasts there are campers, ATVs, trailers and boats that can be rented. “They can take a boating safety course and qualify in our boating program, and then they can take their family out to go boating and halibut and salmon fishing in the area, which is very popular,” noted Bower.



Four additional remote sites were recently added to the RV Park, which is very popular.

## IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

In remote locations such as Alaska, the importance of MWR for service members and families cannot be overstated, said Bower. “I think our facilities and all of our programs, and everything that we do here, make it tolerable for all the families that come to Kodiak.”

Dyer, who has been at Kodiak for 20 years, 12 of those as athletic director, added that these programs and facilities “are heavily relied on by service members and their families, especially during the long, dark winters here, where these activities that we offer help them fight depression and keep their morale up, while helping them connect with other families and service members on base. Having different things for all these military folks to do helps them tremendously.” —MCH