



Army Reserve Spc. Andrea Gonzalez, a dental technician with the 7223rd Medical Service Unit, New Orleans, works in a dental clinic during the IRT's Taskforce Razorback. Photo by Timothy Hale, US Army Reserve



A Soldier from the 276th Engineer Battalion uses a chain saw to clear an access road into a planned Virginia Civil War Site. Soldiers from several Virginia National Guard units worked together on this IRT project as part of their annual training. Photo by Cotton Puryear, Virginia Department of Military Affairs



Air Force Reserve Maj. Donald Shingler, 910th Airlift Wing, Youngstown, Ohio, and Army Reserve Sgt. Charles Dunson, 7223rd Medical Service Unit, Mobile, Ala., conduct a dental exam during the Taskforce Razorback Arkansas Medical IRT screening clinic. Photo by Timothy Hale, US Army Reserve

# IRT Reaches Out

**Innovative Readiness Training provides a win-win for service members and local communities.**

*By Bennett Leigh*

In today's budget-conscious environment, programs that can do more with less are all the rage.

And ones that can benefit both local communities as well as the military are even better.

The Innovative Readiness Training program is a relatively new Civil-Military program created by the Department of Defense out of President Bill Clinton's call to "Rebuild America" in the mid-1990s. The program provides real-world training opportunities for service members from all branches to prepare them for their wartime missions while supporting the needs of America's communities.

And the program has struck a chord for many National Guard and Reserve forces, many of whom have found they can help in their own communities while gaining experience that will help them on future deployments and homeland missions.

"I find it to be a very worthwhile program in terms of doing what the Guard does best," said LTC John

Klinkam, who serves as the Army National Guard's Security Cooperation Branch Chief, under which the Guard's IRT program falls. "We are a grassroots organization. We are located in hometown America. And it gives us the ability for outreach to the communities in a non-competitive manner to provide service to eligible organizations while at the same time maintaining collective and individual readiness. It is absolutely a win-win."

Part of that win is the community relations aspect, said Klinkam. "In the past 10 years, I believe America truly has an understanding of the value of its Guard, not only domestically, but also strategically overseas with the war fight. And any opportunity a Guard unit has to conduct meaningful, real-world training in its backyard — and there's an incidental benefit to the community — How can you go wrong?"

Recent IRT projects have ranged from providing medical and dental services to underserved populations across America to divers to even disposing of surplus army vehicles off the coast of South Carolina to become approved artificial reefs for wildlife. One large, ongoing IRT program can be found

in the mountains of West Virginia, where service members from every branch have been helping to ready the Boy Scouts of America's newest high-adventure base, The Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve. The site is scheduled to open in 2013, when it begins its permanent stint as host to the BSA's iconic national Scout jamboree and the 2019 World Scout Jamboree [For more information on this project, see our sidebar on the next page].

But Klinkam said that the benefit to the community, while wonderful, is not the driving force behind the program. "The T in IRT is for training. The R is for readiness, and we are very much about sustaining that."

And while the IRT program is open to all branches and components of the military, Klinkam says he feels the Army National Guard's IRT program is perhaps the most robust. "The Guard has always been very good at maintaining positive community relations," he said. "IRT is actually an outgrowth of the old community relations program that was managed by community affairs."

“Very stringent vetting process to make sure the IRT is all about valid training, that it doesn’t compete with the private sector and that it does serve an eligible organization—many of which are charitable.”

Any state or territory can submit an IRT application, said Klinkam. He estimates more than two-thirds of the states have participated in the program since its inception.

The majority of IRT programs are engineering-related, but others are medical, human services, aviation and transportation. The things that we do here in the states—operating a bulldozer to move dirt for a new ballpark, let’s say, it’s very much the same operation—training considerations and executions—as you would find when you are moving dirt in Afghanistan or Iraq...or when you need to move dirt in a domestic emergency response.”

Info box: Visit <http://irt.defense.gov/> for more information on the program.

## Reaching the Summit

Helping to build the newest high-adventure base camps and new permanent home for the Boy Scouts of America’s National Jamboree is part of a multi-year joint operations IRT project headed by the National Guard Bureau.

Service members from every branch and component have been helping to ready the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve near the New River Gorge National Park in West Virginia. The 10,600-acre site is scheduled to open in 2013, when it expects to host more than 50,000 scouts and leaders in its first national Scout jamboree. The World Scout Jamboree will be coming to the site in 2019, with even larger antici-

pated crowds.

It will become the BSA’s fourth national high-adventure base and will offer whitewater rafting, rappelling, mountain biking, hiking and more. The Summit joins three existing bases: Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, Northern Tier National High Adventure Program in Minnesota and Canada, and Florida National High Adventure Sea Base in the Florida Keys.

But it is not just the satisfaction of realizing such a large project that makes it worthwhile to the military participants, said officials.

“The real importance of this program, IRT, is the training, or the “stick time” involved,” said Capt. Leonard Nida, who heads the IRT

project for the Guard. “This type of quality training isn’t always out there. It gives our service members an opportunity to come in and hone in on their skills—to learn their limits and their capabilities (and that of their equipment) here, as opposed to learning these things while getting shot at on the side of a hill in Afghanistan.”

In 2011, 621 service members from all branches came to participate in this unique training opportunity, said Nida. And plans have more than twice that number projected to help in 2012.

So far, the program has built some roads into and through the site, as well as prepped and poured three presidential helipads, said Nida. “This year, we have moved a to-

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Before road improvement by the IRT program at the Summit.  
Photo courtesy of the JTF Summit Staff



The same road after the improvements.  
Photo courtesy of the JTF Summit Staff

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tal of about 340,000 cubic yards of earth,” he said. “ To put that into perspective, you could build a three-foot wide, 12-foot high wall 50 miles long with all that dirt.”

The Summit IRT project announced the work that needs to be done, and units sign up to fill those various needs, said Nida, who added the majority of their work so far has been engineering-based.

Gary Hartley, Director of Community and Government Relations for the BSA’s Summit Project, said that the DoD’s IRT program has been most helpful to their organization, allowing them to use their funding most efficiently.

“Having that kind of construction work, and being able to realize that cost savings, it has allowed us to really accelerate our timeline.”

Hartley mentioned an added benefit to the Guard’s continued presence in the community when project managers took over the former local high school to serve as their headquarters. “It keeps the building in use and keeps the building maintenance costs down,” said Hartley, “so it’s a real benefit to the whole community.” ●

Bennett Leigh is a military spouse and freelance writer who lives in Northern Virginia. She first heard about the IRT Program when the Virginia National Guard participated in one of its projects just down the street from her house.

Background photo courtesy of Gary Hartley



Marine Corps Reservists pouring the second Helipad.  
Photo courtesy of the JTF Summit Staff



Staging Location of Top Soil for the Presidential Helipad.  
Photo courtesy of the JTF Summit Staff