



Guard Partnership Renovates Schools in Serbia

Ohio National Guard deploys soldiers from three locations to offer humanitarian assistance.

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Hundreds of civilians, along with Serbian government officials and Serbian and Ohio National Guard troops gathered to greet Serbian Defense Minister Dragan Sutanovac and U.S. Charge d'Affaires Jennifer Brush as they visited schoolhouses in Prokuplje and Soko Banja, Serbia.

The schools are being renovated by the joint militaries via the National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program; Ohio and Serbia have been partnered since 2006.



Staff Sgt. John C. Berling is greeted by local children who have befriended him and other Ohio National Guard airmen and soldiers while they were renovating an elementary school in Soko Banja with their Serbian army counterparts through the National Guard Bureau State Partnership Program.

The Ohio National Guard deployed 39 Soldiers and Airmen from Army and Air engineer units to three locations in Serbia to complete the humanitarian assistance projects. The troops have been working side-by-side with their Serbian counterparts at all three sites since early August.

"Cooperation between Serbian military officials and the Ohio National Guard is important," Sutanovac said.

The day began with a visit to Neven, an elementary school in Prokuplje, where Sutanovac and Brush observed renovations underway including repairs to exterior walls, a new entrance with columns and canopy, installing new toilets, windows and tile flooring, rebuilding interior walls of two basement rooms and various other interior projects. This project, which is being completed by Airmen from the 200th RED HORSE (Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers) and Serbian troops, will serve about 250 children from Prokuplje and nearby villages.

Pavlovic Dusanva, the school principal at Neven, said he is very happy with the work and wanted to thank the U.S. troops, government and entire country, as well as everyone else who helped rebuild the facility because it will make it so much better for the children.

"The joint effort by the Serbian Army and Ohio Guard members on the reconstruction of these institutions is a big step for the children, as the conditions in these facilities have been inadequate so far," Sutanovac said.

Afterward, Sutanovac and Brush traveled to Mitropolit Mihailo, an elementary school in Soko Banja, where Soldiers from the Ohio Army National Guard's 1194th Engineering Company, along with Serbian troops and contractors were reconstructing walls, replacing the water drainage system, replacing and insulating ceilings, recovering floors with wood laminate, insulating the basement against moisture and repainting the entire interior and exterior.

Throughout the project, local children have visited the work sites daily and have come to call the soldiers their friends.

"The work carried out on the schools and kindergartens is of exceptional importance not only because of the children, but also because of the parents and the entire community," Brush said.

She thanked the members of the Ohio National Guard for coming to Serbia, and the Serbian troops for the hospitality shown toward their Ohio colleagues. Work on the three schools was completed when the Serbian children return to school.

"Serbia wishes to take advantage of this experience and to continue building a partnership with the Ohio National Guard," Sutanovac said. **AF**