

# Community plans and liaison officers safeguard mission

## From Staff Reports

As residential and commercial developments expand around what were once rural areas, a military installation's mission, existence, and the economic well-being of the surrounding communities can be at risk.

While no "one-size-fits-all" approach can prevent or stop growth altogether, Navy Region Southeast Community Plans and Liaison Officers (CPLO) are proving that with the proper planning, adjacent lands can be utilized in ways that are both compatible with the military mission and enhance the value of the neighboring community.

"Relationships must be internal and external," said Naval Air Station Meridian's CPLO Jim Copeland. "We are liaisons between departments and tenants on station, from Public Affairs to the Training Air Wing One to Public Works and between military bases, too. We help the bases in Mississippi and throughout the Southeast continue to work together to solve our common problems."

Copeland's main area of focus is Lauderdale, Kemper and Noxubee counties because that is where NAS Meridian pilots do most of their training.

"Although I am really looking forward to new maps, without relationships the best maps and models will stay on the

shelf," Copeland said. "So when the two counties' Board of Supervisors meet, I am always there. I also visit those less than excited to be our neighbors because of the noise. Much of building relationships has been just listening to homeowners."

NAS Meridian follows an Encroachment Action Plan (EAP) developed in 2010 and is now updating an Air Installation Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) study last revised in 2004 with Wyle Labs.

"Wyle models our flight data -- 'Where do jets fly?', 'How high and at what power settings?', -- with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to determine across the landscape such things as, 'What is the average noise level?' or 'How does the shape of the land change the sound?'," said NAS Meridian CPLO Jim Copeland.

"I couple that with my own GIS data such as, 'Is the land used for pasture, forests, or homes?' 'Where has land use been changing over the last 50 years?' 'Are there homes or trailers -- trailers usually have less noise attenuation?' 'Where are cell towers?' I hope the resulting study helps prospective homeowners make wise decisions about where to build or buy a home and helps county officials keep their AICUZ maps and ordinances up-to-date."

Reporting directly to the commanding officer, CPLO's

play a critical role in communicating, managing and taking action regarding compatible land use issues that impact the installation's mission.

The CPLO is responsible for quickly identifying possible mission impacts stemming from land use development, and taking steps to find a balanced solution that benefits the Navy and the community. Although CPLO's in various forms have been around since the late 1980s, the role has increased in prominence in the last 10 years, the result of hard-fought lessons learned in places like Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., where homes and businesses sit directly in the path of low level jet training.

"All military installations attract development," said Navy Region Southeast Regional Mission Sustainment Officer Dave Dahl. "A military installation is inherently a major economic driver that attracts employees and businesses, which in turn spawns area development." Dahl said the CPLO's main mission is to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the public, while supporting the operational mission of the base.

CPLO's start with an (EAP), which identifies and prioritizes potential compatible land use issues. The EAP gives the CPLO a road map to identify stakeholders, reach out to community businesses and city

planners, and build partnerships that both allow development while protecting the mission of the base and the economic benefits it brings to the community. In Navy Region Southeast, no two bases are exactly alike, and each of the region's 15 installations has unique mission sustainment challenges. From Georgia to Texas to the Florida Keys, every CPLO has to become an expert in the operational needs of the base and the threats to that mission in the local community.

Another valuable tool is the Joint Land Use Study (JLUS), which is run by the city or county and funded by the Department of Defense's Office of Economic Adjustment. The Navy is a part of those studies, and it helps cities and municipalities determine a way ahead for development that will benefit the community without impacting the mission of the installation.

"We have not had a JLUS here, but this community really wants the Navy to stay around," Copeland said. "Our more than 3,000 employees certainly want us and so do many others whose livelihood depend on the Navy's \$121 million annual payroll. Since the 1850's Meridian has grown alongside the noise of trains. For the last 50 years East Mississippi has grown with the noise of naval aviators training overhead."