

# Joe Williams fire station, operations center features latest in energy efficient systems

By Penny Randall  
Staff Writer

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KEMPER COUNTY -- Fire fighter Stan Graham hoped he would see the opening of the new joint fire station/operations center at Joe Williams Field before his retirement from government service.

"I made it by only 15 days," said Graham who retires on July 31 and has served as a fire fighter at the field for five of his 21-year career. "This is a 5-star hotel compared to the old station. It will certainly offer the fire fighters who come after me a better quality of life and a great place to work. It's been a rewarding job and now it's time for someone else to enjoy this station."

On July 16, dozens of military, civilian and community leaders were on hand to witness the ribbon cutting and open house on the \$6 million joint fire station/operations center, which is at Naval Air Station Meridian's outlying field. Special guests were the children and grandchildren of Capt. Joe Williams, whom the field is named in honor of, and local land owners who showed their support for the field.

"This new station is good for Kemper County," said Mike Luke, Kemper County District 4 Supervisor. "We have a great working relationship with the Navy, and this station just makes Kemper County a safer place."

The new station replaces one that was constructed in 1961. At the time, the field was known as NAS Meridian Bravo Field, but it was re-named Joe Williams Field in 1987, in honor of Capt. Williams, NAS Meridian's second commanding officer, who had a major role in getting the airfield built.

The construction phase of the building began in April 2009 under the guidance of W.G. Yates & Sons Construction of Philadelphia. The facility supports seven fire fighters, pilots and air operations personnel. It has three bays for fire trucks and other fire fighting equipment, a fuels lab and gear storage area. There are briefing and debriefing rooms as well as a ready room for pilots. Also included are two kitchens, bunk rooms, day room, dining area, physical fitness room and laundry room.

The station has 9,709 square feet replacing one which had only 5,062 square feet. While the new building is larger, it will use less energy because its design includes energy efficiency systems that comply with the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

"We are incorporating both teams -- air operations and fire fighters -- into one building," said Lt. Cmdr. Lance Coe, NAS Meridian Public Works Officer. "This station is much more energy efficient -- all fluorescent lighting was used and high efficiency motors in the equipment. In general it's insulated much better and designed much

better than the old building. We are anticipating a 20 to 30 percent savings each year even through the building is larger."

One of the major energy savings projects was the ground source heat pumps and geothermal field.

"Twenty-eight wells were drilled in the field surrounding the station which will contribute largely to the heating and cooling process of the new station," Coe said. "In addition, the LEED SILVER Certification and energy star appliances will aid in the savings."

There also will be additional savings because indoor storage for fire rescue equipment will result in lower maintenance costs. The obvious difference in the two buildings is the quality of life improvements for fire fighters. Over the last 40 years there have been many advances in design as it relates to fire fighter safety. This fire station/ops center is built to meet all Navy standards for this type of facility and includes hearing protection as well as a start-of-the-art exhaust removal system.

Training Air Wing One uses this field primarily for field carrier landing practice when training and preparing student naval aviators for their first carrier landings. In support of that, air operations personnel and fire fighters at Joe Williams Field supported almost 29,000 flight operations in 2009.

The airfield was recently upgraded as an IFR rated airfield with an authorized Surveillance Approach. This is an important upgrade, because it will allow increased usage of the field. Now aircrew can request an ASR approach to go down below the clouds to see the airport when a VFR maneuver cannot be done because of low clouds.

"The facility is double the size and uses less energy," Capt. Charles Gibson said. "It was built for energy efficiency in mind. I would like to thank NAVFAC Southeast, Yates Construction and the whole fire fighting team for their hard work. This is a facility we hope will last us another 40 years. I can't stress enough the outstanding cooperation we have with the local land owners and Kemper County officials. Thank you for your support that allows us to train here."

The proudest person at the ceremony would have to have been Fire Chief Andrew Clayton.

"This station will improve the quality of life for the fire fighters, military and civilians who work here," Clayton said. "This is a proud day for the fire fighters because it will address safety issues that we had in the old station -- especially the truck bays that were not wide enough for our crash trucks. We have the HVAC system that draws all the exhaust out of the truck bay to protect the fire fighter."

Clayton added that the new center also enhances the capabilities to respond to airfield emergencies much quicker and more efficient.

"This station was very much needed."