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DPW rewards effective sustainers

By **Jake Dorsey/Northwest Guardian**

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The Northwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility and the 542nd Support Maintenance Company are the winners of the Net Zero environmental and sustainability contest at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

The first incarnation of the contest, put on by the Directorate of Public Works Environmental Department, seeks to ingrain behaviors in JBLM military units that are environmentally friendly and produce a cost savings.

NWJRCF won \$10,000 for its unit fund account; the 542nd Spt. Maint. Co. received \$4,500. The money came from proceeds from recycling.

Judges ranked the NWJRCF and the 542nd Spt. Maint. Co., respectively in the large and small categories, based on a scoring system that involves points, penalties and written summaries of unit activities.

Required items included establishing energy conservation procedures and points-of-contact for various environmental duties.

The winners set a high bar for the next contest, which starts soon.

Sergeant Major Ronald Hussung of the NWJRCF said the prairie grass growing program, where prisoners and staff work together to grow eight types of prairie grass, saves the Army about \$280,000.

The grass is replanted in training areas across JBLM to replace grass that has been destroyed.

There's the prisoner waste management engineer program, under which prisoners get training from recycling outreach coordinator Sheila Martin to become waste management engineers.

Those prisoners in turn help manage the recycling at the facility, ensuring that waste is sorted and hauled to the appropriate containers.

"We went from zero waste diversion to approximately 90 percent, from April to now," Hussung said. He added that he is waiting on LeMay Inc. to take away two large trash containers because they aren't used anymore.

There's the vermicomposting system — towers of dirt, waste and worms — that produces fresh, sustainable compost for use in the prisoner horticulture program.

The horticulture program itself, with its four-acre garden, has grown about 8,000 pounds of fresh produce since May.

"My drive was to create a culture, not only with the staff, but the prison population, of sustainability," Hussung said.

Sergeant Lonny Liffick of the 542nd Spt. Maint. Co., has a similar drive. He takes scrap metal he finds on base, brings it to the machine shop he runs on base and repurposes it to make vehicle repairs, refurbish broken parts and manufacture new ones.

He said he thinks he's saved the Army about \$500,000 with the metal recycling program.

"It's to the point where we used to order \$10,000 to \$15,000 worth of material a month," Liffick said. "And in this last nine months, I haven't had to order anything."

Liffick also goes through the free issue system, where Army units turn in gear and equipment that can be reissued to other units across the Army.

The former infantryman is looking at a medical discharge after suffering wounds from multiple IED blasts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but he is teaching three of his fellow Soldiers to follow his lead.

“I’m kinda adamant about it,” the sergeant said from home, while he recovers from recent spinal surgery. “I hate seeing taxpayer dollars go down the drain.”

The application deadline for the second Net Zero contest is Oct. 9. Search for “SustainableJBLM” on Facebook to find out more.

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