

Camp Grayling ready to put modernized facilities to use

by Dan Sanderson-Staff Writer

Sen. Carl Levin, Michigan National Guard officials and community leaders unveiled two centerpieces for the modernization of Camp Grayling last week.

Levin, D-Mich., the chairman of the U.S. Senate's Armed Services committee, was at Camp Grayling for ribbon cutting celebrations for the Operational Readiness Training Complex (ORTC) and Installation Base Dining Facility. The dining facility cost \$1.9 million. Phase one for the ORTC cost \$17 million. Both projects were completed over the last two years and will be ready for use by soldiers in July.

The ORTC is one component of the Army Barrack Strategic Plan. The ORTC concept was developed to rectify a shortage of adequate training facilities for Reserve Component Soldiers.

ORTCs provide transient collective training facilities for reserve component annual training and also have the capability to support mobilization and demobilization.

The complex design provides economical, essential housing, dining, administration and operations for about 750 personnel. The facilities include barracks, senior enlisted and officer headquarters, a dining facility, battalion headquarters, a classroom, company operations facilities and a battalion warehouse.

The Traverse City-based Hallmark Construction served as the primary contractor for the project and over 20 northern Michigan businesses were employed as subcontractors.

The barracks and nearby dining facility gives soldiers an unified place to train as they do annual training or are training for mobilization.

"Our troops deserve the best. They are doing everything they can for us, and they and their families sacrifice greatly for our nation," Levin said. "We've got to do the best we can for them, and the new facilities at Camp Grayling are an important part of fulfilling that duty."

The barracks are air conditioned and heated. They will be utilized more, replacing barracks built in the late 1960s and early 1970s that required troops to go to off site bathrooms. The older barracks are furnished with steel bunk beds built for World War II.

During early spring and late summer, cool temperatures sent troops scrambling into Grayling to buy space heaters.

"If you're training during that time of year, you hope for good weather," said Lt. Col. Jim Gardiner, deputy post commander for Camp Grayling.

During some days, soldiers spend up to 20 hours a day training as they complete early morning and nighttime range firing to prepare them to battle in the rugged terrain in Afghanistan. Troops can now stay at Camp Grayling year round and train up to three weeks or more if they're being mobilized for the global war on terrorism.

"It depends on the mission that they're training for," Gardiner said.

A second phase for the ORTC, which is estimated to cost \$16.4 million, is slated for Camp Grayling depending on decisions from federal lawmakers.

Maj. Gen. Gregory J. Vadnais, the adjutant general and director of Military and Veterans Affairs for Michigan, told Levin that Camp Grayling hopes to have the capability to host multiple battalions or brigades and become more of a regional training facility for the U.S. Armed Forces.



Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., the chairman of the U.S. Senate's Armed Services committee, was at Camp Grayling for ribbon cutting celebrations for the Operational Readiness Training Complex (ORTC) and Installation Base Dining Facility. Above, Levin, Traci Cook, executive director of the Grayling Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Maj. Gen. Gregory J. Vadnais, the adjutant general and director of Military and Veterans Affairs for Michigan, cut the ribbon at the new dining facility. (Photo by Dan Sanderson)

Bids are about to be awarded for a Combined Arms Collective Training Facility, which is used to prepare troops to fight in urban settings. The facility will include 27 buildings, complete with roads, alleys, parking areas, underground sewers, parks, athletic fields and a command and control building. The cost for the training facility is estimated to be \$19 million.

"It's a training facility and everything has to appear like it appears when the troops are in combat," said Crawford County Commissioner Terry Beardslee, who is a heating and plumbing contractor.

A light demolition range, anticipated to cost \$1.8 million, is slated to be built at Camp Grayling in 2016.

While a brunt of tax dollars has come into northern Michigan and the community through hiring subcontractors and purchasing supplies and materials, recent developments will not add many full-time jobs at Camp Grayling. Gardiner said the Installation Dining Facility, which will be used by full-time staff year round and by other troops, will be staffed by existing Camp Grayling employees.

Units that will stay in the ORTCs utilize their own cooks or award government contracts to companies to provide food and beverages while they are training.

Funds, however, will trickle out to businesses as more and more soldiers come to Camp Grayling for training.

"You see a lot of camouflage walking down the street going in and out of the stores," said Dave Stephenson, chairman of the Crawford County Board of Commissioners.

Stephenson, president of AJD Forest Products, was amazed to see the development at the military installation.

"After all the trees came down, it's like a whole new city cropped up," he said.

Levin discussed the state of business in Grayling with Traci Cook, executive director of the Grayling Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Cook told Levin it depends on the perspective of different people you talk with, but any improvements at Camp Grayling are a plus for the local economy.

"The more they update Camp Grayling and the more time and money they put into the facilities, the more people will come and train here, which is a good thing," Cook said.

Cook also said that seeing the troops gives the community a better view on the wars taking place in the Middle East.

"They have such a huge presence and it makes it easier to keep up with what's going with the military and the wars that are going on," Cook said.

Camp Grayling and Michigan National Guard officials praised Levin for bringing funds to help the military with its mission back to the state. Levin toured Camp Grayling three years ago.

"After that visit, it seemed like money started falling out of sky," Gardiner said. "He's done a great job getting some state of the art stuff out here for our training."