

Levin inspects \$17.57M Camp Grayling improvements



Sen. Carl Levin walks with Maj. Gen. James Vaden (l) following a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Camp Grayling's newest dining facility. (HT - Chris Engle)

Chris Engle, Staff Writer

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GRAYLING — During a stop at Camp Grayling Wednesday, **Sen. Carl Levin** performed two ribbon cuttings and toured several new facilities, the construction of which he was instrumental in funding.

Wielding a shiny pair of scissors alongside camp officers, project architects, contractors and dignitaries, Levin, D-Detroit, cut the ribbon to a new base dining facility, which will be staffed by a contracted kitchen staff and serve the men and women of the National Guard who work and/or live on the base. Levin did the same at the Operational Readiness Training Complex (ORTC), a sprawling area for housing and feeding National Guard soldiers and their officers during weekend and annual training. He took brief tours of both facilities and also visited the old mess halls and barracks which the new ones have been built to replace (see related story).

The \$16.7 million ORTC and \$1.87 million dining facility were funded by earmarks within the 2009 federal budget. Levin said he had pushed for another \$19 million in earmarks to fund Phase II, a continuation of the ORTC project, but that funding was slashed along with all other earmarks in the most recent budget. He assured those in attendance at the ceremonies that he “will be getting more funding for Camp Grayling.”

“(Camp Grayling) has got a tremendous location with lots of land and all the potential you need,” Levin said of his focus on funding projects at the base. “We’ve put a lot of money into it, but we’ve got a long ways to go. The Guard performs an essential role in the wars we’re in. We want to give troops and their families the best.”

Levin commended Gaylord architectural firm Bradley J. Butcher & Associates, as well as Traverse City-based contractor Hallmark Construction, for their work on the project. According to Camp Grayling, more than 20 Northern **Michigan** companies were subcontracted for the projects.

Both Levin and Maj. Gen. James Vadnais said that without updates to modernize the 157,000-acre National Guard facility, Camp Grayling could lose out to other states in the training of soldiers.

“Over time it will get competitive,” Vadnais said, calling Camp Grayling “one of the premier training facilities in the country.”

Vadnais, a Gaylord resident, is also the new adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veteran Affairs.

The projects are part of nearly \$25 million in upgrades that have taken place at Camp Grayling since 2009, including an Infantry Squad Battle Course, Live Fire Shoot House, Urban Assault Course, building renovations and new pavement. Another \$37 million in major construction projects are planned through 2016, including ORTC Phase II, a Combined Arms Collective Training Facility and Light Demo Range.

The months of May through July are the busiest for training at Camp Grayling, with May alone seeing 1,000 soldiers on the ground at the base each day.

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