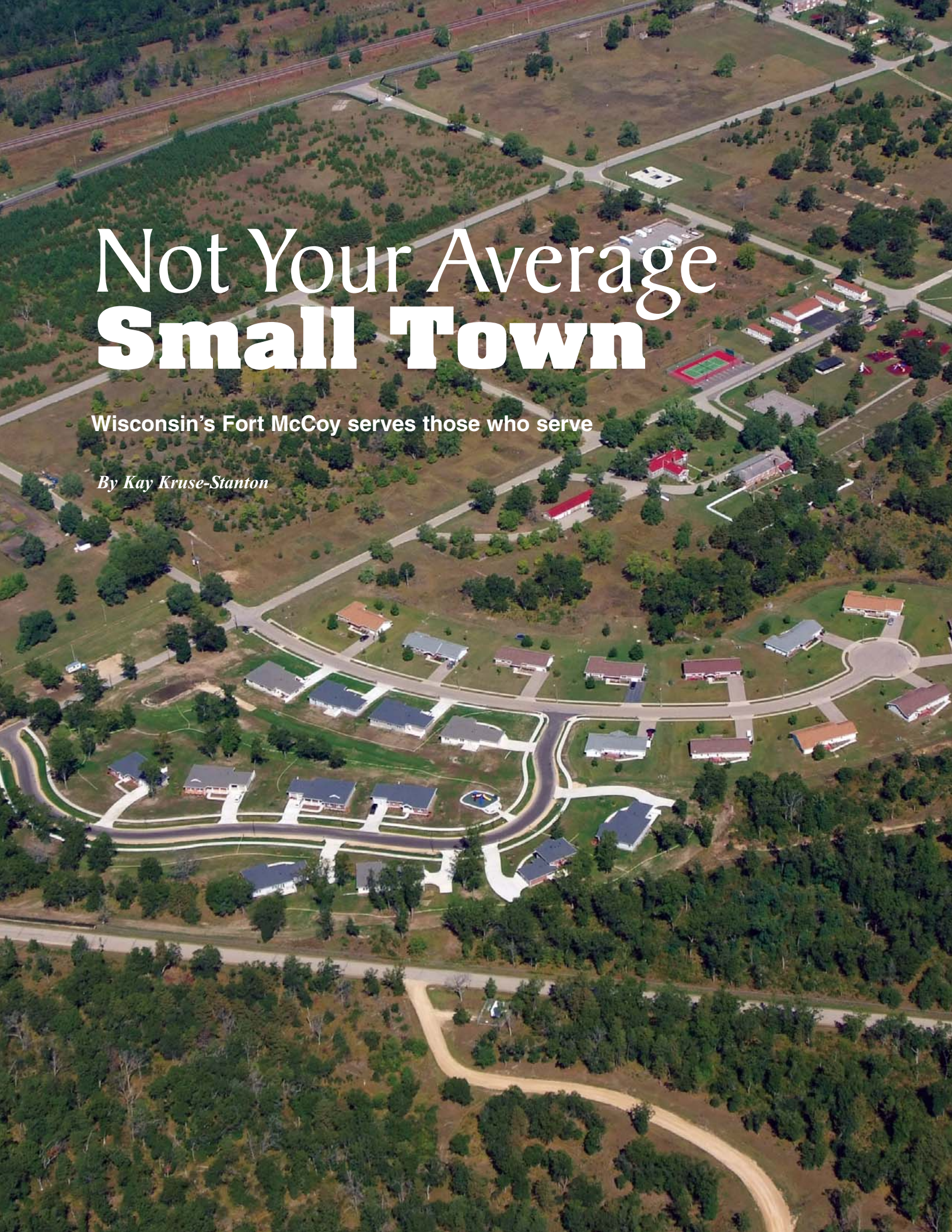


Not Your Average Small Town

Wisconsin's Fort McCoy serves those who serve

By Kay Kruse-Stanton



Municipalities routinely rely on consulting firms to provide needed services, but one “community” in Wisconsin receives – and deserves – extra care and consideration.

“It’s a city, but most people leave at the end of the day. It’s a workplace, but we have more than the usual emphasis on security. It’s different from other cities,” said Linda Fournier, public affairs officer for the community: Fort McCoy.

The Fort is a 60,000-acre military training installation in scenic Monroe County, near the center of Wisconsin. Like a city, Fort McCoy has police and fire departments; a wastewater treatment facility, recycling center, medical facilities, and post office; and more than 400 miles of roads. It has a gas station and stores, laundromats and car wash, welcome center and fitness facility, and services ranging from a child development center to chapels.

But the property differs from a traditional city in very important ways. Just one small example: This “city” has 93 miles of tank trails, special speed limits for motorists wishing to pass troops, and more fences topped with security wire than sidewalks.

“First and foremost is military

security,” said Dennis Johnson, supervisor of environmental services at Ayres Associates in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He’s been involved with several projects at Fort McCoy. “The level of required security will vary with the project, but one of the most important considerations is always the safety and security of the troops at the site.”

Ayres Associates has worked at the Fort since the late 1970s on architectural, engineering, and environmental projects.

One of those projects is critical to maintaining security. In 2002 Ayres Associates designed the main entrance gate canopy, a secure area safe from the elements for security personnel to inspect trailers and larger vehicles entering the installation.

Other projects have taken Ayres Associates crews to far corners of the Fort for design of sewer and water lines to the ski hill and campground, final design of housing, environmental work to monitor for soil or groundwater contamination, and modifications to buildings.

The buildings themselves are another way the Fort differs from the usual city. Most of the 1,200 structures were built to serve World War II

populations. The emphasis here is on function; aesthetics are secondary. And all the structures are owned by the “city” of Fort McCoy.

“We manage all of our buildings,” said Dave Gundlach, chief of the Fort’s operations and maintenance division. “A city might do zoning to regulate types of construction, but we actually take care of all of the facilities. That’s the roads, the bridges, the training areas, and all of the buildings.”

The buildings include limited housing for military families. In summer 2008 construction crews completed 13 new officer and enlisted family homes including landscaping, streets, and open areas. Ayres Associates developed the preliminary plans into a full set of construction documents for the project.

“Essentially it’s a whole neighborhood, with top-quality homes to welcome families and

Fort McCoy covers 60,000 acres in Monroe County, Wisconsin. It serves as a training installation for military personnel from all branches of the armed forces. The entrance gate canopy (shown above right) was designed to enhance security at the Fort.



make their life at Fort McCoy more enjoyable,” said Raivo Balciunas, manager of architectural services at Ayres Associates in Eau Claire and lead architect for the project.

The housing is an investment that can help maintain a high-quality military force, Fournier said.

“People these days expect cell phones, MP3 players, cars. There’s a lot of competition today, not only to encourage people to enter the military but to stay in the military,” Fournier said. “If soldiers see their children are not experiencing the quality of life they deserve, they’ll be less likely to remain in the military.”

Providing good recreational

opportunities for military families is also important, Fournier said. Ayres Associates has been involved in developing the Whitetail Ridge Ski Area and Pine View Campground on the west side of the Fort’s acreage. Both are open for public use. The campground hosts more than 50,000 campers a year.

Ayres Associates was also involved with improvements to the Fort’s dental clinic, health clinic, child development center, and fitness center – all services designed to improve the quality of life for service personnel.

Only a few military personnel live at the Fort for any length of

time. The Fort’s population ranges from 6,000 to 10,000 most of the year, as people from all branches of the armed forces come for short-term training. During the past two decades the Fort has welcomed more than 100,000 troops annually. Some stay for a weekend; others stay for a week to a few months.

The transient and long-term populations share a focused reason to be on location: to prepare for military activity. That affects the types of improvements completed at the Fort.

“The troops that are here for a short time may have a bed in a room with 24 others. But it’s for a weekend. It’s for two weeks. Do we really need

to invest in new sleeping quarters for that population?” Fournier said. “It’s more important to invest in facilities that provide the training those soldiers really need.”

Fort McCoy, like most “communities,” has to compete for limited project funding. But while a municipality works with local taxpayer dollars and competitive government grant and low-interest loan programs, Fort McCoy’s major projects come under national scrutiny.

“Most of the major construction projects go through Congress for approval and funding, then go to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for design and implementation,” Gundlach said.

It’s a long process that requires Fort McCoy to plan far into the future, much like any community trying to determine future needs.

“We’re looking out 30 to 50 years in the master planning process,” Gundlach said. “We know what our mission is and what we think the future of the Fort will require. We work from those planning assumptions. We’ve got major construction planned out for the next five years and plans out far longer than that.”

Not all projects can be anticipated. Fort McCoy is committed to environmental stewardship and has invested in projects to protect natural

resources and remediate areas affected by past practices.

Examples include investigating for contamination from old chemical storage warehouses, petroleum pipelines, and similar structures, all byproducts of an era across the United States when environmental consequences were secondary to infrastructure needs.

Ayres Associates’ staff has installed soil borings and monitoring wells and collected soil and groundwater samples to monitor environmental quality at these sites. Where appropriate, cleanup strategies have been implemented.

Near one equipment site, for example, an underground storage tank that collected used oil from vehicles was not operating correctly. Ayres Associates was involved in removing the tank, remediating the area, and installing a replacement tank.

While improvements that result from these projects are not visible, they have helped to reduce environmental risk and enhance environmental quality for people, flora, and fauna at the Fort. When facility planners are assured that an area is free of contamination, they can plan for its future use.

“There is a constant need to plan,” Fournier said. “We need

accurate information to help us in that process. What buildings do we need to replace? What are our needs for the future?”

Even while staff looks to the future, several people at Fort McCoy recently have been focused on the past. The installation marks its 100th anniversary in 2009. Events throughout the year will carry an anniversary theme, and commemorative postcards and other items will be available. In honor of the anniversary, Fournier has written a book on the history of the installation, “Images of America: Fort McCoy.”

For about 30 of those 100 years, Ayres Associates has been helping to make the installation a better place for troops receiving training, the permanent workforce, and visitors.

“Ayres Associates has been good to work with,” Gundlach said. “They’ve done many projects here.”

New housing for military families (shown on opposite page) was completed in 2008. The development includes 13 new officer and enlisted family homes. The Fort also provides recreational opportunities, such as the Pine View Campground (shown above). The campground and the Whitetail Ridge Ski Area are open for public use.





Historical Perspective

By Kay Kruse-Stanton

In honor of the 100th anniversary of Fort McCoy in 2009, public affairs officer Linda Fournier has compiled a history of the property, “Images of America: Fort McCoy.” Copies are available at the gift shop at the Fort and through Arcadia Publishing. The history of the Fort in many ways is the history of the United States:

- Col. Robert Bruce McCoy returned from the Spanish-American War with a goal of establishing an artillery camp suitable for training soldiers. He bought acreage near Sparta, Wisconsin, for what is today Fort McCoy.

- The Department of War in 1909 purchased Col. McCoy’s land and additional land to assemble 15,000 acres. The first orders were issued out of the installation that year.
- Construction of permanent buildings at the site began in 1911, including a concrete ammunition storehouse constructed for \$8,000.
- World War I era soldiers came to the installation for training on firing a 3-inch gun and 12-inch mortars, establishing field mess and wireless operations, and operating a machine gun auto truck.
- Horse-drawn guns and caissons gave way to motorized units by the late 1920s.
- During the Great Depression, military training continued side-by-side with efforts to administer the supply of clothing, subsistence, and equipment for Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in Wisconsin.
- In 1940 what was by then called Camp McCoy was selected as the site for the Second Army Maneuvers, drawing about 60,000 enlisted troops from six states for training. During World War II the property was increased to today’s 60,000 acres, and as many as 8,000 people were employed to build a new containment area complex that included 1,557 buildings.
- Camp McCoy served as a prisoner of war camp in the first half of the 1940s, with nearly 3,000 German, 500 Korean, and 2,700 Japanese enemy inmates.
- With the end of the war, Camp McCoy’s mission changed to that of a reception and separation center for soldiers returning home. Nearly 250,000 men from Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Michigan, and Montana were processed and discharged. Just a few years later, the site trained troops for the Korean conflict.
- In the 1960s, Camp McCoy housed a Job Corps Center, a federal program that provided regional vocational training centers for young men from low-income families.
- In the 1980s the property – by then named Fort McCoy – was designated as a Resettlement Center for approximately 15,000 Cuban refugees who came to the United States in the Freedom Flotilla.
- Technological advances have dramatically changed the training that troops receive at the site. Troops now use tank-mounted lasers to locate obscure targets in dim light. Modern-day trainees develop skills in computerized simulators – and in full combat gear on the sandy hillsides in remote corners of the installation.
- The 1990s saw the start of major renovations at Fort McCoy. More than 400 of the original temporary World War II wood facilities were demolished. Others have been remodeled and renovated. ■