

Civil engineers welcome new deputy director

On Feb. 9, the directorate of civil engineers welcomed a new deputy director. Edwin Oshiba, now the deputy director of civil engineers, deputy chief of staff for logistics, installations and mission support, is not new to the Air Force civil engineer community. Says Brig Gen Green, “Ed has been a tremendous leader in the CE family for many years,” said Brig. Gen. Timothy Green, director of civil engineers. “He has successfully led organizations through change and always looks forward to what can and should be done to help our Air Force and Airmen.”

Oshiba said he is looking forward to his new role despite the many challenges CE is currently facing, and will continue to face in the future.

“The Air Force is meeting the reality of a rapidly changing, unstable operating environment by institutionalizing strategic agility — so too must Air Force civil engineers. The ability to be flexible, adaptable and responsive has been a hallmark of civil engineers, so I am optimistic that we will continue to Lead the Way in these challenging times,” he said.

To further understand Oshiba’s goals and leadership style, he recently sat down for an interview with us.



CE Magazine: What are your top three priorities as the incoming deputy director of CE?

Oshiba: If I had to narrow it down to three, I would say they are: 1. Support (General) Green in reaching for his goals and accomplishing his objectives for the organization; 2. Strengthen communication both internally and externally to our functional community; and 3. Enhance civilian force development opportunities.

Concerning my first priority, let’s just say this about (General) Green: he’s the right leader, with the right skill sets, at the right time for Air Force civil engineers. First and foremost, my job is to support him, and part of that is to provide my unfiltered advice and perspective as the senior civilian in our career field. We don’t have to agree; that’s perfectly okay. In fact, it’s good when we don’t, because what we need is diversity of thought in order to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

CE Magazine: How does today’s ever-changing environment pose a challenge for you as the deputy director of CE? What opportunities do you see in these challenges?

Oshiba: The biggest challenge today's rapidly changing environment poses is uncertainty. It's akin to trying to solve an algebra problem where we have no constants, just variables.

Our civilian Airmen have borne the brunt of fiscal constraints and frequent re-organizations: furloughs, pay and hiring freezes, additional workload created by frequent deployments of our military, and now, the second major re-organization in as many years, which will reduce opportunities for our dedicated civilians at major commands and headquarters Air Force. However, that challenge also poses an unprecedented opportunity to increase the breadth of our civilian Airmen professionals. We may find cross-functional, interdepartmental and maybe even private-industry partnership opportunities opening up as alternatives to the decreasing civil engineer positions at our MAJCOMs and HAF. Similarly, we can find these same types of challenges and opportunities in other areas of our enterprise, such as readiness, and public-public/public-private partnerships. The key will be to remain open-minded and optimistic about what may lay ahead for our Airmen engineers.

CE Magazine: How do you see yourself impacting force development for civilian leaders? In what ways do you see civilian force development changing?

Oshiba: I'm going to reserve comment on the first question until I've had the opportunity to chair my first Functional Advisory Council (FAC). My goal is to leverage the wealth of knowledge and experience found in our career civilians. I will also work to support the ongoing and new initiatives I know the FAC will develop to overcome the changing landscape associated with the management headquarters reduction and the stand-up of the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center. This goes for not just our degreed engineers and architects, but for our talented and equally dedicated wage grade professionals.

As for changes in civilian force development, I would like to see more opportunities for flexibility. Just like the Air Force is looking for ways to provide "breaks in service" for our uniformed Airmen, perhaps we can find ways to provide those same opportunities for our civilian Airmen. Those opportunities could be aimed at furthering their education, gaining experience outside the CE career field, leveraging private sector work experience or maybe raising a family. Whatever the reason, we should find a way to afford them that opportunity in a non-punitive way, because what we get in return for that temporary loss of an employee is a civil engineer with a broader perspective and new ideas or approaches to old problems.

CE Magazine: The Air Force is really big on leadership courses. How do you suggest that prospective leaders make the most of these courses? How can they actively prepare to take on a leadership role outside of the classroom?

Oshiba: The first thing we all need to realize is that the "classroom" doesn't end within the confines of a university or an (Air Education and Training Command) campus. Our classrooms should extend to our workplaces, and we should take an active role in *Building Great Leaders* and *Ready Engineers* no matter where we are, or what level of command we're working within. Yes, the Air Force has many different options within the three levels of Professional Military Education, and yes, we should support our Airmen in completing these courses either in-residence or via correspondence.

That said, we should also look for other opportunities to build enterprise leaders and trusted professionals. Maybe it's the weekly shop safety briefing, where we give one of our up-and-coming technicians the opportunity to cover a particular safety topic. It could be during Wingman Day,

where we give one of our junior engineers the chance to organize the day's events. It could also be during recurring "brown bag lunches" where we share our lessons learned. The bottom line is that taking on a leadership role outside the classroom starts by simply raising your hand. You can find boundless opportunities to improve your own leadership and that of your fellow Airmen, and it all starts with taking a proactive role in your workplace.

CE Magazine: In a fiscally constrained environment, how do you see CE priorities shifting in the next couple of years?

Oshiba: If you mean "what will we spend our dollars on?" I would say that we'll see the Air Force attempting to define the alignment of facilities and infrastructure to the missions they support so that we can make the most informed decisions with the limited funds we'll have. For example, runways may be a top priority for limited facility funds if you're in (Air Combat Command). However, if you're in (Air Force Space Command) and the base's primary mission is cyber operations, runways may be much less of a priority than, say, an electrical system or (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) reliability.

As the Air Force continues to make hard choices with regard to balancing combat readiness with future modernization and recapitalization, we will need to do our part, which will require equally hard choices. We will also need to be innovative in how we deliver civil engineer capabilities, perhaps through public-public or public-private partnerships. Or maybe we'll employ regional approaches. Bottom line: I suspect we will focus on gaining the greatest impact with the smallest investment possible, and continue searching for and employing innovative solutions. What we've always done as civil engineers.

Now, if you mean "how will our overall CE priorities shift in this fiscal environment?" I would say it will only underscore the importance of building *Ready Engineers*, *Great Leaders* and *Sustainable Installations*. No matter how constrained our funding becomes, we have a sworn duty to defend our Constitution and the freedoms and values it represents, at home and abroad. And that will take contingency-ready Airmen engineers, in and out of uniform, to establish, operate, sustain, protect and recover the platforms from which our Air Force projects combat power through air, space and cyberspace. This takes strong leaders at all levels, who have the character and competence to exude the trusted professionalism necessary in such tough times. Lastly, more now than ever, we need to improve the sustainability of our installations. We don't have the luxury of repairing or replacing something prematurely due to poor maintenance, substandard construction or wasteful resource practices. So, to answer your question — "shift"? No. "Reemphasize"? A resounding yes!

CE Magazine: Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh is often quoted for his belief that the Air Force needs to shift focus from what the Air Force has been to what it needs to be. How do you see CE aligning with this demand for agility?

Oshiba: First, some context to this quote. General Welsh made this comment during our discussion of the right active duty/air reserve component (ARC) mix as part of the Total Force-Continuum initiative. We basically re-accomplished the old "Blue Suit Review" by defining the blue-suit engineer requirement from combatant commander operations plans, garrison sustainment needs and institutional demands, and determined how best to meet that requirement from a cost and operational perspective. For many, the transition from primarily an active-duty force to one where the ARC is the majority may have been a big cultural paradigm shift. In the CE community, we have operated as a Total Force for decades, and we

continue to remain adaptable, flexible and responsive to the needs of the warfighter.

However, there may be other areas for Airmen engineers to become more agile in the future. We may need to think “beyond our patch.” Instead of just looking within our MAJCOMs for expertise, resources and support, we may need to look across MAJCOMs, or maybe even to other services and federal agencies. Certainly, the AFIMSC will help foster a more enterprise-wide view, but that view may need to be extended down to the installation level to ensure we’re applying the right resources to the right priorities and highest risk. We may even find ourselves looking across functional areas, especially for force development opportunities as our civil engineer opportunities dwindle at the MAJCOMs and headquarters Air Force.

I do see us aligning well toward the (Secretary of the Air Force) and (Air Force Chief of Staff’s) call for strategic agility. Nevertheless, we have a long journey ahead and much to explore. I feel extremely confident, though, that we will continue to make steady progress. One thing that I’ve repeatedly seen: Airmen engineers are innovative, agile and resilient. It’s part of our DNA to find solutions to the toughest problems. I remain optimistic about our future; a future in which engineers continue to *Lead The Way!*

Editor’s Note: *Oshiba’s biography is available [here](#).*