



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers** ®  
Galveston District

# News Release

2000 Fort Point Rd  
Galveston, Texas 77550  
(409) 766-3004  
swgpao@usace.army.mil

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## **Civil engineer makes community proud**

by Isidro Reyna  
Galveston District Public Affairs Office

Many would consider growing up in the largely African-American Sunnyside neighborhood south of downtown Houston as rough. That didn't stop one resident from taking the community slogan the neighborhood is known for, "Sunnyside Pride," and making his community prouder than ever.

Clark M. Colquitt, a civil engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District, recalls a visit he made to the district's former headquarters building January 1974 as a student at Prairie View A&M University.

"We were in our freshman civil engineering class and we wanted to know how the Corps operated, so we toured the old Santa Fe building which at that time was on 25<sup>th</sup> Street in Galveston," said Colquitt. "We visited a dredge boat and went to some Corps of Engineers projects."

Colquitt credits his interest in engineering to a former vocational drafting instructor at his alma mater, E.E. Worthing High School.

"Mr. John Oliphant wanted more African-American students from the school to go into engineering. It was more of a lucrative type of situation," said Colquitt. "I had no idea of civil engineering. I thought it was basically drafting."

Following Oliphant's guidance, Colquitt enrolled in engineering courses at Prairie View A&M, a historically black college and university.

"I had a very large class. It was 90-percent African-American," said Colquitt. "When I got to Prairie View, I realized there was a lot of math involved in engineering so I had to really buckle down and study."

Colquitt's studying paid off as he graduated from Prairie View in August 1977 with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

"My parents were very excited. I was the first person in my family to actually get a degree. When I walked across the stage at Prairie View, my mom took my degree out of my hand and said I want to keep this," said Colquitt. "She wanted to frame it and show it to her friends -- a whole lot of friends. She actually kept my degree for about two months; she was just that excited."

"I grew up in a rough neighborhood," said Colquitt. "It was a big accomplishment for me to come out of Sunnyside and reach my goal."

Like many college students, the search for a job after graduation was on the top of Colquitt's list.



*Clark Colquitt, a civil engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District.*

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“When I got the call from the Corps of Engineers, I was in my dorm and I actually hit the ceiling,” said Colquitt. “I could not believe it. I interviewed with many companies but I wanted to stay in Texas. I was very excited.”

“I was nervous my first day at the Corps of Engineers. It was a totally different experience for me,” said Colquitt. “Growing up in a black neighborhood, it was a different culture. I had to really adjust to the new culture of civil engineering and being in a different environment.”

“I was on an 18-month training program where I got to work in different offices and get a better perspective of the Corps,” said Colquitt. “My very first project was the Texas City Flood Protection Project. After I got off the training program, I worked in hydraulics and hydrology for about 15 years and then I transferred to the geotechnical and structures section and I’ve been there for 17 years.”

“Now I specialize in jetty designs and I also specialize in soil investigations and soil classifications,” said Colquitt. “I’m known as the ‘rock man’ in the district. If you want to know anything about rocks, give me a call.”

“I participate in jetty design, stone protection and erosion protection-type projects,” said Colquitt. “A jetty is a rock structure that extends out into the water that breaks waves and reduces wave heights. They’re very important during hurricane season. You’ll notice the rock groins we have out by the Galveston Seawall. You’ll also notice that most of the homes by the Seawall area weren’t destroyed. The jetties also capture sand, which restores coastlines and beaches.”

“I’ve seen the Corps change from a local standpoint to a worldwide organization,” said Colquitt. “The Corps has participated not only in emergency operations, but also during times of conflict with other countries, rebuilding and reconstructing countries and redesigning structures.”

“I was involved in several emergency operations, including Hurricane Hugo in the 80s and Hurricane Rita,” said Colquitt. “I had a stint as a civilian with the Corps in Kuwait during the time when Saddam Hussein blew up all the oil wells.”

“The entire sky was literally black. It’s an experience I’ll never forget. I felt like I was giving my part to rectify the situation,” said Colquitt. “I was involved in the design of the underground piping systems. I never thought I’d be deployed; I was over there for a couple of months. It makes you appreciate America more.”

Serving the nation isn’t the only thing Colquitt is known for; he also offers advice to future engineers.

“Focus on being the best engineer and also being the best person you can. You want to share your experience with other future engineers. You want to create a legacy and leave a legacy,” said Colquitt. “Once you get into any type of professional series, you want to try and help others and mentor them. That’s the way I look at it. You go beyond the call of duty to help others. That’s what I try to focus on. I get instant gratification by helping others.”

Colquitt also spreads this message to those in the Sunnyside community.

“I’ve been a little league baseball coach for about 12 years,” said Colquitt. “I also try to share my experiences with them. I try to stress that to most of the African-American kids in the community where I grew up.

Colquitt said the stability of the organization and the great people he’s met throughout the past 32 years have made the Corps a great place to work.

“I’ve seen this organization really progress into an organization that is more diverse,” said Colquitt.

Colquitt said working on the many jetty projects along the Texas coastline, being involved in emergency operations from the extreme East Coast to the West Coast and also being promoted and receiving his professional engineer’s license have all been highlights of his career.

“I’ve traveled and seen other parts of the nation and world,” said Colquitt. “If it wasn’t for the Corps, I probably wouldn’t have been able to experience that.”