

State Chamber meets at Fort Sill

Oklahoma strong — Army strong

State Chamber meeting a city, base showcase

When Lawtonians began floating the idea of having the Oklahoma State Chamber's annual meeting at Fort Sill, they wanted to show off the Lawton-Fort Sill community, to tell the rest of the state what's happening here and impress on them the importance of the military, both as a matter of defense and economics.

They're not ready to proclaim mission accomplished, but they think Thursday's meeting at Fort Sill is a good start.

A record crowd — the event at the Patriot Club sold out after 350 people had signed up, and there was a waiting list — conducted business, heard a legislative update, listened to Army Lt. Gen. David Valcourt, honored Oklahoma military men and women and saw Lawtonian Phil Kenney installed as chairman of the statewide business organization.

"Everybody did a great job of planning this," Kenney said after the meeting, which attracted a large crowd from the Lawton-Fort Sill community as well as directors



STEPHEN ROBERTSON/STAFF

Phil Kennedy talks to members of the Oklahoma State Chamber after taking office as new chairman of the organization, which had its annual meeting Thursday at Fort Sill.

and members from the rest of the state. Dick Rush, president of the chamber, said directors were impressed by the event, which began Wednesday night with a dinner and briefing with Fort Sill Commander Maj. Gen. Peter Vangjel, a visit to the Army Field Artillery Museum and demonstrations by Buffalo Soldiers and the Field Artillery Half Section.

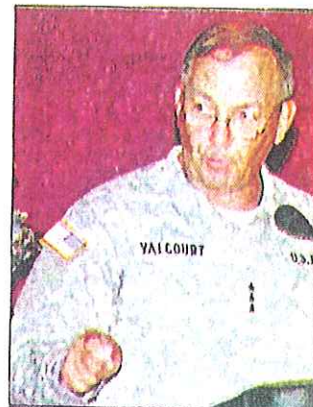
SEE KENNEDY, 3A

Former leader recalls Fort Sill survival story

Translating "Army Strong" into "Oklahoma Business Strong" was Lt. Gen. David P. Valcourt's theme when he delivered the keynote address at the Oklahoma State Chamber's annual meeting Thursday at Fort Sill.

Valcourt served as commanding general of Fort Sill from 1994 to 1996. Maj. Gen. Peter M. Vangjel, the current Fort Sill commander, introduced him by saying it was on Valcourt's watch that much of the planning and initiatives began for combining the Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery Schools into one Fires Center of Excellence.

Vangjel hailed Valcourt as "one of the Army's true warrior leaders." An artilleryman, he rose from commanding 40 soldiers at the battery level here to having 40,000 soldiers under his command at the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea. He is currently deputy commanding general of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) at Fort Monroe, Va., where he continues to work issues relating to Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), but at a higher lev-



STEPHEN ROBERTSON/STAFF

Since his stint as commanding general of Fort Sill, Lt. Gen. David P. Valcourt has led the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea and served as "BRAC-meister" for TRADOC (Training and Doctrine), but he returned here Thursday to share a few words of wisdom with the Oklahoma State Chamber.

el that encompasses more people and locations than Fort Sill.

As the "BRAC-meister" for TRADOC, Valcourt said the summer of 2011 will see a lot of activity "when all four of our four-star headquarters are moving simultaneously."

SEE VALCOURT, 3A

VALCOURT: Points to Goodyear manager as leadership example

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Valcourt recalled that when he was post commander here, "I took the position that Fort Sill was in trouble."

Few today remember the Internet prediction posted by an obscure former captain that Fort Sill would meet its demise in the 2005 BRAC round. "I tried to find and define ir-

refutably why the Department of Defense needed Fort Sill in the future. And we asked the question, 'What was enduring and unique here that defined why we needed to be here at Fort Sill and not at Fort Bliss (Texas)?' And the answer was not in the obvious," Valcourt said.

He told reporters afterward that it was no sure thing that the Field Artillery School would not move to Fort Bliss. Fort Sill officials had to build a case for keeping it here, and the answer lay in the unique natural gifts in this location.

One was that Fort Sill has the best airspace for joint fires training between the Mississippi River and the Rockies, Valcourt said. Sill also had a "joint-friendly" population for training that understands the noise it lives with is truly "the sound of freedom," he added.

Fort Sill is also an ideal power projection platform for mobilization of reserve component units to support the war, Valcourt said. Jim Beazer of the Directorate of Logistics charted the efficiency of Fort Sill's rail operations, showing why it was cheaper to ship equipment by rail from Fort Sill to Beaumont, Texas, than from Fort Hood, Texas, to Beaumont.

At one point, Valcourt offered unexpected praise to Lawton Goodyear Plant Manager Billy Taylor. He said Taylor confronted the economic downturn by shifting part of his workforce from original equipment tires to replace-

ment tires to meet an anticipated change in consumer demand.

"Really, that was a masterstroke of a great leader, and one who's not just a manager of resources but a leader of people who genuinely cares and is a champion for his people. Great to know you, sir," Valcourt said.

The general said afterward that his father and grandfathers were both tire builders, and he toured the Lawton Goodyear plant while he was here, so he was interested when news of Taylor's forward-thinking practices reached all the way to Virginia.

In paying tribute to Lawton businessman Phil Kennedy's installation as state chamber chairman, Valcourt said there's one thing that gets the personal attention of every single American, and that's the economy.

"It's about having a job, earning a fair wage for an honest day's work and being able to provide security for your family and enjoy a decent quality of life," Valcourt said.

Valcourt recalled a few years ago when then Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki, now secretary of veterans affairs, wanted to lead a strategic change in the Army, so he initiated a strategic lead-

ers course. Valcourt was one of the brigadier generals who visited five corporations, and he recalled two opposite ends of the spectrum. He said he was impressed by one CEO who said he made a personal habit of taking 10 percent of the energy and resources of his company and investing it in a small group whose purpose in life is to try to make the other 90 percent of the company irrelevant.

"When you stop and think about it, that's exactly what your competition's trying to do," said Valcourt.



STEWART ROBERTSON/USAF
Lt. Gen. David P. Valcourt, left, deputy commanding general of Training and Doctrine Command, gets better acquainted with Lawton Goodyear Plant Manager Billy Taylor after offering an unexpected tribute to him during his keynote address to the Oklahoma State Chamber of Commerce on Thursday.

Valcourt was disappointed to hear a Harvard University president confide in them that he was quite frustrated because the university money was not being held at his level but rather with the deans of the university subordinate schools, and the administration was having extreme difficulty convincing any of them to share their capital resources in order to invest outside their individual schools' direct core competency and to take the university to the next higher level. As a result, self-interest and a little bit of parochialism appeared to block the opportunity for more strategic growth and benefit for the larger university.

Valcourt said the common thread that characterized all five highly successful organizations was their recognition of their people as their most valuable asset.

"Your people must be No. 1. A computer or a piece of machinery has no emotions, no feelings, no heart, no spirit and no families. It's people who have these qualities, and that's why people are so mission-critical. We manage resources, but we lead people. When we try to manage people, we ultimately fail," Valcourt said.

Leadership in a free, democratic society demands different values than in oppressed societies, said Valcourt, calling what's happening in North Korea and Iran examples of "what wrong looks like."

KENNEDY: Hospitality from Lawton area 'tremendous'

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"Our leaders are just raving about the experience they've had," he said.

"The hospitality from Lawton and Fort Sill and Maj. Gen. Vangjel last night was tremendous," said Steve Turbibo of Tulsa, the outgoing chairman.

It was the first time the annual meeting had been conducted on a military installation, and it also was the first time for Lawton-Fort Sill to host the event.

"We hope we showed you something great in Oklahoma, because we truly believe Lawton-Fort Sill is great," Kennedy told the crowd.

Kennedy, who has been chairman-elect the past year, told chamber members that Lawton-Fort Sill wanted to host the meeting to honor the men and women who defend the nation's freedom and to point out the huge impact of the military on the state, which he put at \$8 billion and 80,000 jobs.

"If that's not an economic driver, I don't know what is," he said.

Kennedy said the chamber will continue to work to provide a climate for economic growth; worker compensation reform and health care will continue to be on the radar during the coming year.

"Phil Kennedy is going to do a great job running this organization in the coming 12 months," Turbibo told the crowd. "This organization is going to do nothing but get better and better and better."

Kennedy returned the compliment. "I can tell you we had a great leader this past year," he said. Kennedy presented special awards to Gilbert C. Gibson, a former state chamber chairman and civilian aide to the secretary of the army emeritus, retired Maj. Gen. Leo Baxter and Rush for their parts in making the event a success.

Rush said the organization is already taking steps to pay more attention to the state's military installations. It is re-establishing its Military Affairs Committee, which will be composed of members from military communities and will work to make sure installations fare well in the next round of base realignment and closure.

And during its business session Thursday the organization's board of directors approved a resolution supporting establishment of military-civilian partnership councils around the state, using the new Fort Sill and Southwest Oklahoma Community Partnership Council as a model.

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