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Improving Fallujah's Quality of Life

By Norris Jones
Gulf Region Central

FALLUJAH, Iraq – Maj. Angel Ortiz says he and his staff have the job of rebuilding Fallujah, despite the ongoing threats. He's working in one of the most challenging areas in Iraq.

"Our hope is to do some good so that residents there see things are getting better," said Ortiz. Ortiz is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division Fallujah Resident Office officer in charge and supervises a staff of 22 people including eight Iraqis. "Those local nationals are risking their lives every day going out and visiting the projects to ensure our contractors are providing quality construction in a safe manner," he explained.

"We're managing 87 projects in Fallujah and the surrounding area valued at \$195 million. We're working on rebuilding Fallujah's entire electrical distribution system, constructing four primary healthcare centers each capable of providing medical care to 150 patients daily, and expanding the city's water treatment capabilities," Ortiz continued.

"My favorite project is the wastewater treatment system that will replace the city's reliance on septic tanks. That \$80 million effort includes pump stations, trunk mains, and a modern sewer treatment plant. It will get the sewage off the street and out of the Euphrates River, benefiting this area for decades to come."



Major Angel Ortiz, California Army National Guard, chats with a youngster near one of the construction sites in Fallujah, Iraq. That child, whose father is employed there, says when he gets older he hopes to be involved in the same kind of work helping build Iraq's

All these projects have meant a boon to the local economy with hundreds of local residents now part of the work crews. "They have good jobs and know they're helping their community," Ortiz said.

Ortiz and his staff work in partnership with local community leaders including those on the Fallujah Reconstruction Committee, the Fallujah City Council, and Director Generals from the various Ministries. "We see them on a weekly basis to ensure our efforts are meeting their expectations."

Ortiz was mobilized as a member of the California National Guard's Engineer Brigade 40th ID and is concluding his one-year tour this month. "It's been a great assignment. We're improving the quality of life for the citizens of Fallujah and I'm proud to be part of these efforts."

He had special praise for his wife, Mariluz, and their three children. "I have great support from them. My wife has done a tremendous job taking care of everything and that's allowed me to concentrate on the work here. I can't thank them enough for all they do."

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