

The District's Samoan Circle

By Mark Kane, Public Affairs

"I have an idea and I think it will change the future of the way the Rock Island District does business!"

That's a profound statement, but how can I bounce this "idea" off the District masses without inundating E-Mail inboxes with so-called unofficial mail?

In the mid-1990's Rock Island Deputy District Engineer, Lt. Col. Mike Duffy,

"The Samoan Circle was developed in the era of Lt. Col. Mike Duffy and was an anonymous way of sharing information," said Larry Jones, executive assistant.

"The initial intent was for people to share or brainstorm good ideas on how to better the District, and it would be more effective than a suggestion box."

The original intent of the District public folder directly mirrored the history behind a Samoan circle.

So what is a Samoan circle anyway?

The U.S. Department of Transportation

lists a Samoan circle as one of the organization's public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making.

The agency states, "a Samoan circle derived its name very loosely, with only vague reference to the Pacific Island group

expected to maintain their own discipline. They gather in two concentric circles — an inner circle with a table and four chairs, and an outer circle, with ample walking and aisle space. Everyone begins in the outer circle. The issue is presented, and discussion begins. Those most interested take chairs in the inner circle. Those less interested stay in the outer circle. All are able to move in or out of the center as the discussion flows or topics change.

"Each speaker makes a comment or asks a question. Speakers are not restricted in what they say or how they say it, but they must sit in the inner circle.

"Someone wishing to speak stands behind a chair; this signals those already in the circle to relinquish their chairs. No outside conversations are allowed. Comments are often recorded. Votes of opinions held by non-speakers are taken at the end, if desired. To close a meeting, empty seats are taken away one by one until there are no more chairs."

The Department of Transportation also states that "the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers frequently uses the technique for both internal and public meetings to define priorities and stakeholders in project planning."

Although the Rock Island District Samoan Circle is conducted differently, the District originally aimed to get the same results.

"It has had its cycles; sometimes it's a "gripe" session, but other times it brings up some great ideas," said Jones. "When that happens we try to act on it or it gets forwarded.

came up with an answer to that question using technology that had recently premiered throughout many government agencies. The cutting edge technology was simply making "E-Mail" folders accessible through a Local Area Network to enable users to access files stored in the electronic folders.

Through Microsoft Outlook or Exchange, District employees are able to access designated "public folders." A particular public folder titled "Samoan Circle," has developed a reputation throughout the District.

called Samoa. In fact, the formal structure began during a land use study in Chicago. Its purpose is to organize discussion of controversial issues or within large groups, instead of holding a free-for-all, no-holds-barred complaint session.

"A Samoan circle has no facilitator, chair, or moderator. Participants are

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- Larry Jones

In the end, it took the place of a suggestion box.

"It has the potential to bring attention to items that need to be addressed quickly and expediently," said Jones. "For example, one time there was a problem in a parking lot area that we didn't know about until it was posted."

On a day-to-day basis the Samoan Circle is used to highlight useful information, but Jones said some content is not tolerated.

"One thing that is not allowed is personal derogatory remarks on individuals," said Jones.

Both Jones and the District Chief of

Information Management have the power to delete such remarks.

"Other than that, almost everything is left alone," said Jones.

The Samoan Circle continues to be a good place for District employees to retrieve and post information, but nailing down exactly what kind of information an employee should post has lead to many discussions.

Jones said, "(messages should have) the ability to make quick attention to management or other employees of actions that they are not comfortable

bringing to the attention of their supervisors."

For more information, view the U.S. Department of Transportation's complete list of public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/smlgroup.htm> 

District Christens Motor Vessels

The District christened its newest motor vessel, the "M/V Creve Coeur" April 25 at Peoria Lock and Dam in Creve Coeur, Ill. The M/V Davenport will be christened May 31 at Oneida Landing in Davenport, Iowa.

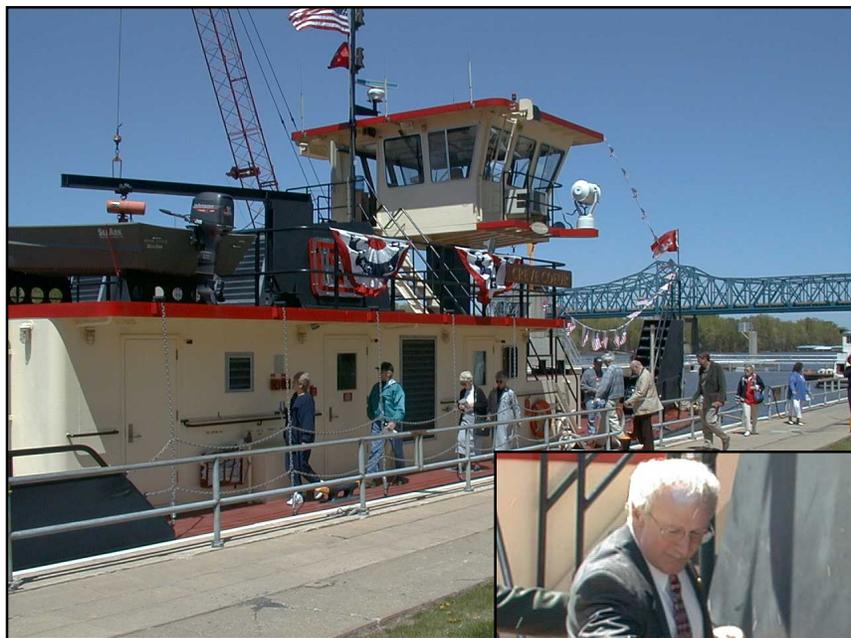
The mayor of Creve Coeur, Marvin D. Prather, talked about the city's history and how it relates to the motor vessel.

"From our earliest days, our citizens have been filled with courage and a pioneering spirit," said Prather. "If she is anything like the citizens of her namesake, she will provide you with years of dependable service."

The M/V Creve Coeur was built by Patti Shipyard, Inc., located in Pensacola, Fla., and took eight months to build at a total cost of \$3.25 million.

The M/V Creve Coeur is assigned to the Illinois Waterway Project Office in Peoria, Ill., and assists in the repair and maintenance of locks and dams on the Illinois River. It is used for switching, line-pull and free-running service. The jack-up pilothouse will enable the boat to clear bridges all the way into Chicago, Ill.

It is suitable for year-round operation in shallow, ice and drift-strewn rivers of the Illinois Waterway. The M/V Creve Coeur is a twin-screw, open-propeller, diesel-powered vessel with an all-welded steel hull and superstructure. 



Photos by Mark Kane, Public Affairs

Top: Guests tour the newly christened M/V Creve Coeur at Peoria Lock and Dam, Creve Coeur, Ill.

Right: Mayor Marvin Prather christens the Rock Island District's newest motor vessel, M/V Creve Coeur.

