

## Chamber makes annual advocacy trip to Washington

Fort Bliss, El Paso communities discussed at AUSA conference

BY RICHARD DAYOUB  
Chamber President/CEO

The Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Congressman Silvestre Reyes, Mayor John Cook, REDCo and a host of business, military and civic leaders organized its semiannual pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., with Team El Paso. The October trip, primarily focused on military issues, is scheduled to coincide with the Association of the U.S. Army's Annual Worldwide Conference.

The tradition began in the 1990s as the Chamber led an effort to educate leadership in the Pentagon and Department of the Army on the great asset and potential of Fort Bliss to the defense mission of America. The planning for each of these trips begins many months in advance. Our planning committee partners develop the agenda of diverse issues affecting our community that we must address. Reyes' staff assists in arranging many of the high-level meetings. We begin virtually every meeting with Army leadership with a sincere expression of our appreciation for the support provided to Fort Bliss and the El Paso community. We also provide a candid view of our progress and some of



From left: Eddie Miranda of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce Government Relations Division; retired Sgt. Sammy L. Davis, Medal of Honor recipient; and Chuck Harre, chair of the GEPCC Armed Forces Division, pose for a photo at the Association of the United States Army Annual Worldwide Conference in Washington, D.C.

the challenges we continue to face inherent with this growth. Housing, education, healthcare and transportation are the key topics of discussion in most of our meetings.

Recently, the Department of Defense Education Agency announced a science coaching grant in the amount of \$300,000 to the El Paso Independent School District. Not only did we thank them for their assistance but underscored the importance of expanded funding to other El Paso school districts. The city was granted nearly \$1 million by the Office of Economic Adjustment to assist in

planning for the impending growth at Fort Bliss. These grants are but two examples of the importance of our continuing commitment to partner with Army leadership. During this trip, we met with OEA to seek their continued support for funding education in El Paso. In our meeting with Lt. Gen. James D. Thurman, the Army's deputy chief of staff for operations and training, we discussed the possibility of a Center of Excellence for Future Combat Systems and offered our continued support for FCS testing and evaluation in our region.

Our meeting with Lt. Gen. Robert Wilson, commander of Installation Management Command, was our third in as many years. We spoke about the need for more construction dollars in order to remain on schedule for future troop arrivals. We also discussed housing concerns outside of Fort Bliss. Will we have sufficient affordable housing? How will the population shift affect the kind of housing needed in the community? The Chamber's Infrastructure and Development Committee in partnership with

See AUSA CONFERENCE, Page 2