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Airman provides the logistics behind Obama's archival move

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Christopher Gross

Many former presidents have a library in their namesake, showcasing many records and artifacts from their presidency. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California; the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston are two examples soon to be joined by a library in Chicago honoring the achievements of President Barack Obama.

However, the movement of items that exist inside those libraries and museums aren't transferred like a typical household goods move. Specially formed teams from the military and the National Archives and Records Administration have worked with White House staff to coordinate the transfer since late 2016 with the final truckload of supplies expected to arrive in Chicago by early 2017.

Lt. Col. Vianesa Vargas, the chief of Joint Team Records, is leading the charge for the more than 700 mile trek from Washington D.C. to Hoffman Estates, Illinois, just on the outskirts of Chicago. She's the lead logistician in charge of a joint team of Airmen and Soldiers who've prepared semi-trucks full of artifacts. In all, more than 20 trucks are expected to make deliveries.

Vargas described her team as the "muscle behind the move." NARA is responsible for packaging the items from the White House and then coordinates with Vargas and her team for the shipment.

"Our team will assist NARA in going over to the White House,

picking up the documents, records or gift(s) and they bring it all to the National Archives and at that point it's planned for onward movement," Vargas said.

On the receiving end at Hoffman Estates is a team of Sailors from Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, who combined with the team from Washington D.C., Vargas said, has been exceptional and one of the best NARA has said they've worked with.

Vargas and her team are responsible for every record and artifact from the time it's being loaded until it's on the shelf at Hoffman Estates. She said her team has the ability to track and have visibility during the entire transit, including every stop along the route.

Growing up just outside Sacramento, California, Vargas said she never envisioned being put in the position she's currently in, having the responsibility of moving historical artifacts for one of the most prominent people on the planet.

"When I left Sacramento I thought I was going to go to school and become a fitness trainer, one of the top fitness trainers in the nation, that was like my goal then ... life has a way of kind of pointing you in the direction of where it needs you to go," Vargas said. "So joining the Air Force ROTC program, that opened up my mind and my heart to something much bigger, much bigger than myself."

Vargas, who has been in the Air

Force for 18 years -- her first 11 were active duty and the rest of her time served in the Air Force Reserve -- said her various logistics jobs, including joint assignments, have prepared her well for her current assignment.

Aside from working with NARA and White House staff, Vargas has coordinated with multiple agencies from Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, and the Air Force District of Washington.

"There's all these different parts that we have to all work with, and being a logistician, that's really where we excel -- is being the integrator of all of that," she said.

John Laster, the director of the Presidential Materials Division for NARA, said Vargas and her team are very skilled and have been very efficient throughout the entire process thus far.

Obstacles have not been a factor for Vargas and her team, as Laster said they've been very flexible and responsive to meet demands.

Laster said it's too hard to plan too far ahead, as the current administration is still running the country, and "there's a lot of decisions that are made very quickly and the military has been fantastic about understanding that."

Although the library isn't expected to open until sometime in 2021, Vargas said she can't wait to take her family to visit and tell them how she had a piece in making it all happen.