

BRAC comes marching into Harford County

by Melody Simmons

Published: August 19th, 2010

Harford County is bracing for an influx of thousands of new workers over the next two months as new BRAC-related facilities begin to open.

The landscape in and around Aberdeen Proving Ground is dotted with construction equipment that has been preparing 526,000 square feet in new space for an office and technology park called The Gate.

"The first ribbon cutting will be Sept. 17," said Matthew F. Holbrook, director of federal programs for St. John Properties, which has the exclusive development rights at APG.

Holbrook cited recent data compiled by CoStar, a commercial real estate information company, which showed 40 percent of all new office building construction now underway in the U.S. is located in the Baltimore-Washington area, mainly because of the Base Realignment and Closure process.

Citing APG alone, he ticked off a list of defense contractors that have already signed leases (and some have already moved in) including CACI, with 60,000 square feet, Raytheon Co., 75,000 square feet, L-3 75,000 square feet, General Dynamics, 12,000 square feet and The Boeing Co., 6,000 square feet.

In addition, St. John is preparing to break ground on two new buildings totaling 180,000 square feet.

Thousands of jobs are expected to follow over the next year and a half.

The timing of the BRAC influx has county officials scrambling to keep up with the increased traffic and new residents.

Denise Carnaggio, deputy director of the Harford County Office of Economic Development, said county officials are monitoring the changing traffic and residential patterns forming in the once-rural county. Officials are already promoting flex working hours and van and carpooling as ways to ease the traffic.

Around 1,800 new jobs have already moved into APG, and beginning this fall, another 2,500 workers will begin to arrive, many from Fort Monmouth, N.J. Including private sector jobs, the new positions will total around 10,000 by September 2011.

"We have already had 42 new defense contractors move in, 24 of them in the last six months," Carnaggio said. "It's great for our citizens because it offers more positions and more revenue for the county as well."

Harford County has invested in a business park to help smaller incubator companies get established in the BRAC zone. The park, called the Harford Business Innovation Center, is located in Riverside, about three miles from the APG gate.

George Mercer, the public affairs officer at APG, said major construction is under way on the sprawling base. The huge building, known as C4ISR, an acronym for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence Surveillance, Reconnaissance, opened its doors this month to mostly civilian Army employees.

"It is the largest building in Harford County," Mercer said, adding, "We are on or ahead of schedule."

That building will officially open in early October, he said, when the flag from Fort Monmouth is moved to APG and raised for the first time at its new home.