

Base-linked jobs begin to arrive in Maryland

Contractor opens offices in Harford

By Justin Fenton
Sun reporter

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In a key first step to the anticipated relocation of tens of thousands of jobs to Maryland under a national military base consolidation, a major government contractor opened the doors yesterday to its plush new waterfront offices near Aberdeen in Harford County.

With about 150 local employees, Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. expects to double its presence in the coming years as military operations move to Aberdeen Proving Ground from New Jersey, and a state official said the company became the first of the large contractors to make the leap.

Amid the fanfare came concerns from one of the company's senior partners about the area's readiness - comments that reflect tempered enthusiasm over the expected growth and Maryland's ability to accommodate such an influx.

"The big issue for the people in this room - with these types of capabilities heading this way is going to come people, hopefully a lot of them," said Gary D. Mather, a Booz Allen senior vice president. "But it's going to have to be attractive to them. This is not a reshuffling of deck chairs."

State officials have said Central Maryland could see more than 100,000 people settle in the region as a result of new military and private-sector positions, many of which Harford County expects to receive. Estimates of job totals - particularly those in the private sector - have climbed throughout the process, and officials say that will likely continue.

The epicenters of expansion are Aberdeen Proving Ground and Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County. APG expects more than 6,100 new jobs, while Fort Meade projects 5,300 government jobs, which will arrive from several parts of the country under the consolidation.

With the numbers changing by the week and the timetable unclear, officials have formed task forces to tackle key infrastructure questions such as the strain on

housing and school construction.

But Mather's comments seemed more centered on the quality of life in Harford County, which was criticized by leaders in New Jersey as they fought last year to block the shifting of resources from Fort Monmouth.

A survey commissioned by supporters of the New Jersey base suggested that only 19 percent of current workers would move from Fort Monmouth, which, they warned, could cause Maryland to scramble to fill the remaining positions.

Yesterday's news conference was attended by Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steele, who called the ribbon cutting the start of a "new era for the community." The secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, Aris Melissaratos, and a host of local officials also were on hand. Included was a demonstration of Booz Allen's high-tech gadgets, such as a biometric scanner that reads facial contours for identification.

Afterward, Mather, who is based in the firm's McLean, Va., headquarters, and Booz Allen official Nicole Funk, who oversees the Harford County office, talked about improving county roads and school infrastructure. Also, Mather described difficulty in trying to find a nearby restaurant on his car's GPS system. "The nearest thing I could find was Bel Air," about 10 miles away, he said.

Of the \$100 billion in government contracts Booz Allen has secured in the past two years, Mather said, \$20 billion came from work at Fort Monmouth and could shift to APG. About 170 employees there will move to Aberdeen before the military operations have landed - communicating via Web casting and other means - so that the transition doesn't take place in "one big gulp."

Meanwhile, no defense contractors that are part of the base realignment and closure (BRAC) program have moved to the Fort Meade area, said Alexis Henderson, a spokeswoman for Anne Arundel County's economic development office.

But officials with the county and Fort Meade are laying the groundwork for an expansion of at least 20,000 jobs, the first of which are expected to arrive in 2008.

Military planners are seeking approval to build a 4-million- square-foot development at the center of the 5,400-acre Army post. The space would accommodate the Defense Information Systems Agency, whose 4,000 employees are relocating from Northern Virginia, along with the National Security Agency and other sensitive operations.

DISA, the military's combat support agency, is the largest federal agency moving to Anne Arundel under BRAC. State officials have estimated that DISA could attract 8,000 private-sector contractors.

Construction has begun on a 2-million-square-foot business park in [Annapolis Junction](#) that could house DISA contractors. Similar large-scale development is planned elsewhere in the area.

In Aberdeen, Booz Allen's facilities are in a plush, \$100 million, mixed-use corporate park along U.S. 40, dubbed Water's Edge for its scenic views of the [Chesapeake Bay](#). The campus, which is under construction, features executive housing, a putting green and a nature reserve.

Harford County Executive David R. Craig said the office park is an example of the area's ability to adapt. He pointed to redevelopment efforts focused on U.S. 40 and a joint marketing initiative with Baltimore and Cecil counties as positive steps.

Officials from Harford County and Aberdeen will go to New Jersey next month for a "relocation expo." They recently returned from a conference in Atlanta held by the federal Office of Economic Adjustment.

"More work does need to be done - and we will be ready when they get here," Craig said.
