

J. Thomas Sadowski: BRAC money flowing into region

J. Thomas Sadowski, The Examiner
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BALTIMORE -

BRAC money is here. On Sept. 26, the government awarded a \$477.5 million contract to a Washington-based development team to build the new Communications and Electronics Command Headquarters at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

For years the government and the private sector have talked about improving public infrastructure and services for the military's plans to expand in Maryland, who should pay for those projects, and how. But many wondered: "Is this really going to happen?"

Finally we have an answer — a \$478 million "yes." This means local businesses must look for contracting opportunities coming to the region.

Each installation in greater Baltimore, Ft. Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground will easily see more than \$1 billion in new construction, infrastructure and facility improvements. The Defense Information Systems Agency will also get a new headquarters at Ft. Meade for about \$400 million. And these major missions moving to greater Baltimore each spend \$5 billion plus annually, with 25 to 30 percent of contracts awarded to small and medium-size businesses.

With 60 to 65 percent of federal employees eligible for retirement by the time critical missions relocate to the region and similar percentages of people retiring at businesses supporting relocating missions, plenty of job opportunities exist. And they extend beyond supporting the moves and core military jobs to legal, health care, engineering, HVAC, accounting and law enforcement positions.

Providing these services is just one way local small and medium-sized companies can take advantage of Base Realignment and Closure-related opportunities. Local firms should also learn to operate under the security clearances of the businesses that support the missions. Security clearances are expensive and difficult to obtain, so establishing relationships with core businesses supporting the mission will be essential.

When can we expect this growth to occur?

With \$478 million being spent to upgrade the IT infrastructure at Aberdeen Proving Ground, construction work has already begun. Some of the large defense firms say they will move when the customer moves. For example, Northrop Grumman runs the Army's Software engineering center at Ft. Monmouth in New Jersey. That function will move as the mission moves, scheduled now for sometime in 2010. Other contractors, including Raytheon, MITRE Corporation, EG&G, Booz Allen and CACI are already scouting new locations, signing leases for new or expanded offices, and hiring employees in the Baltimore region.

Relocation efforts mean thousands may be coming to the area. Recent reports from Ft. Monmouth

suggest 30 to 50 percent of its employees are considering relocating to the Baltimore region.

And discussions with Maryland's higher education community have generated ideas to not only sustain and support these critical missions, but also ways to commercialize technologies used by them and spawn new businesses and industry.

BRAC is an important catalyst for the region to build an economy and a workforce of the future. The money has already started to flow into the state with billions more to follow. To take advantage of the money and the demographic shifts in the market, local businesses must learn how to work with the military and mine the state's large talent pool. It's no longer a question of when or if BRAC will affect the state, but how we can benefit most from the military's relocation and expansion in Maryland.

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