

## Lockheed holds job fair in hopes of landing defense contract at Benning

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The ramp-up in defense contractors doing business at Fort Benning because of the post's long-heralded expansion is beginning to take shape.

Lockheed Martin, a well-known defense firm that already does some work on the sprawling installation, is positioning itself to snag even more of the contracting pie.

The company is holding what it calls a "future job fair" Thursday at a Columbus hotel in anticipation of landing a contract this summer that will be the prelude to the U.S. Army moving its Armor School from Fort Knox, Ky., to Fort Benning.

The combined infantry and armor training operation is now called the Maneuver Center of Excellence. It is mandated to be fully in place by September 2011.

"We're hoping to win this thing," said Ray Bernhagen, program/site manager for Lockheed Martin, which operates a battle lab at Fort Knox. "That's why we call it future jobs, because we don't have any jobs right now. Once we win this thing, then we can get some jobs" under a new contract.

Lockheed has been at Fort Benning three years and already has more than 100 staffers working in information technology, weapons and lifesaver training, and some doctrine writing, Bernhagen said.

The firm expects bidding for new contracts to begin in May, with the deadline for submitting proposals in June. The contract should be awarded in August, with hiring kicking in immediately, Bernhagen said.

It's a high-stakes effort, with an estimated \$457 million in contracts being awarded and spread among several defense companies.

"The way that works is they'll have a lot of different tasks come out under that contract vehicle, and there will be a number of winners," he said. "I would say everybody who wins will probably get anywhere from \$20 million to \$70 million out of that."

Lockheed expects about 120 employees will be needed if it receives the contract it is targeting.

"It will be a mixture of admin stuff and the guys who have the armor and infantry background that can help teach some of those skills," Bernhagen said.

The contracts being awarded this year will only be a start, however. Lockheed expects even more being put up for bid in 2011, then hitting a peak a couple of years beyond that.

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“I think you’ll see the majority of contracts being awarded in 2012 and 2013,” Bernhagen said.

In all, the military’s growth estimates for Fort Benning indicate about 4,800 contractors will be needed by the time the Maneuver Center is operating at full tilt.

“That’s huge,” said Janeen Tucker, executive vice president of work force development at the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

“We’ve already got a lot of them out there, but we’re anticipating your Northrup Grummans and a lot of these other big defense contractors,” she said. “They’re all going to be heading in this direction.”

Earlier this month, Raytheon Co. opened a Soldier Works Warrior Integration Center on Schomburg Road in Columbus, a 10,000-square-foot training facility with simulators that is expected to prepare soldiers for live combat.

The firm said more than 500 employees, partners and customers will flow through the center each year.

The overall impact of Fort Benning’s expansion from the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process, as well as the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is substantial.

Aside from the 4,800 contractors, the military estimates about 4,700 soldiers will be added here along with nearly 1,900 government civilians.

Factor in roughly 16,700 family members to come up with a city-sized population increase of about 28,000 people.

The dollar signs are eye-popping as well. The economic impact of Fort Benning on Columbus and the surrounding area, once the buildup is complete, is expected to be just under \$6 billion per year.

That impact includes salaries, defense contracts and money spent on homes, apartments and vehicles, in restaurants and retail stores and with service businesses.