

## Post Information Fair Will Highlight Benning's Assets

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Fort Knox's Armor Center Strategic Plans Cell and Fort Benning, Ga.'s Valley Partnership will present an information fair at later this month. Unlike some of the previous visits, this exposition will feature extensive data about Fort Benning and its surrounding communities.

According to Linda Brady, the Relocation Director for Columbus, Ga.'s chamber of commerce, this event plans to highlight many more areas than past information exchanges, with 85 booths and more than 200 representatives.

Travis Riddick with the SPC said this fair has been expanded because more personnel now possess specific assignment information. In the past, Fort Knox personnel knew that Armor Center staff would be moving, but exactly who would go to Benning and who would be transferred to other jobs wasn't determined. Now, those Soldiers who are Georgia-bound have been notified and are probably ready for more specific information about the Benning area. In addition, as the time draws closer, more civilians and contractors may be weighing a move decision more carefully. The fair won't focus on any one group to the exclusion of others.

Featured providers include representatives from economic development, education, finance, military – Fort Knox and Fort Benning -- health care, legal, workforce development, lodging, quality of life, and housing.

Brady said the booths will be arranged in such a way that Soldiers will enter the Bullion Room of the Leaders Club where the military specific information will be found. Agents from military housing and transportation, in particular, will be available to answer questions.

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“That design should allow Soldiers to have a clearer picture of their requirements before they start talking with school or real estate representatives so they can make more intelligent decisions,” Brady said.

Some military Families may be puzzled why so much information is forthcoming on this move compared to the more common scenario when Soldiers are given transfer orders with little else. While there may be abundant information sources, supplemental information is acquired by personal initiative.

Brady said the Valley partnership – which is comprised of the ten counties within a 35 mile radius of Fort Benning – recognizes that moves are stressful enough, but this particular move may be more difficult than others because so many Families will be moving at once.

“The Armor Center is being moved to Fort Benning to form the Maneuver Center of Excellence with the Infantry. We realize it could just as easily have been Infantry being moved to Fort Knox, so we know we are lucky enough to stay home and they have to move,” Brady explained. “We want them to feel at home here.”

Brady is uniquely qualified to compare the two military towns and their long love affairs with Soldiers. Brady grew up in Elizabethtown, Ky. and went to school from kindergarten through high school in the E-town school system. Her father retired after 30 years of civil service on Fort Knox.

“I’m one of y’all,” she said with pride. “We treat Soldiers like family and we always take care of families here.”

One of Georgia’s shining benefits, Brady said, is the Hope Scholarship program. It allows any high school senior with a B average to go to college – private or public – tuition free. The usual residency requirement is being waived by the scholarship administrators who acknowledge that military Families don’t have the luxury of choosing when or how often they must move. Furthermore, those military Families who live across the state line in Alabama,

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which is a short drive from the installation, may still qualify for a Hope Scholarship as long as the active duty parent is assigned to Fort Benning.

For those spouses who are concerned about the job market, the employment picture in the Columbus area is especially good. According to a survey done by Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, the strongest market in the U.S. belongs in Columbus with an 18 percent hiring surge predicted for the first quarter of 2010. Since the bulk of BRAC-drive jobs won't arrive until late 2010 or early 2011, that employment uptick is independent of the military's contribution.

For more information about the Chattahoochee Valley, visit their Web site at [www.fortbenningandthevalley.com](http://www.fortbenningandthevalley.com) or stop in on Apr. 29 at the Leaders Club from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.