

## As Workers Move In, The Area Braces Itself

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**Odenton Patch by Tim Lemke | January 12, 2011**

As many as 200 new federal workers will be arriving at Fort Meade each week through the summer. The impact will be hard to miss.

For more than five years, residents of Anne Arundel County have heard the term "BRAC."

The acronym for Base Realignment and Closure has been thrown around to refer to the eventual arrival of thousands of new workers to Fort Meade and the surrounding area.

But that growth is no longer just an eventuality, as workers began moving into new office space at Fort Meade this past weekend.

The workers are employees of the Defense Information Systems Agency, and they will be moving in at a rate of between 150 and 200 each week until the end of the summer, representing 4,372 new people moving in and out of the gates of Fort Meade each weekday.

Thousands of additional workers from the Defense Media Activity and the co-location of the Defense Adjudication Program will be in place by this fall, resulting in a total of 5,695 jobs at Fort Meade this year. The National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command have their own expansion plans, and by 2015, county officials estimate more than 27,000 new workers in the area as a result of growth at the base.

When the federal government in 2005 announced the movement of these agencies from Northern Virginia and elsewhere to Fort Meade, it was widely praised by Anne Arundel County leaders as something that would boost the local economy, improve schools and raise the area's national profile.

Officials are still thankful for the potential for growth, but admit that a variety of factors, mostly economic, have left the area unprepared for the onslaught of new workers.

"We're doing what we can, but it's very tough times," said County Executive John Leopold, who has pushed for more state funding to help with BRAC-related impacts.

Many of the necessary amenities and services to accommodate the new workers aren't yet in place. And key transportation upgrades, such as the widening of Route 175 and gates at Fort Meade, have been slow to come.

"You're going to take anyone who comes here and benefit the tax base," said Drew Pruski, a member of the board of education and president of the Four Seasons Community Association in Gambrills. "But the challenge is how do you work those people in?"

In many ways, county and state officials fell victim to a major shift that resulted from the nation's economic troubles beginning in 2008. Before the collapse of the economy, borrowing money for development was cheap, and the area seemed well-equipped to accommodate the thousands of residents that would be flocking here. Money from the state was also plentiful.

But these days, many workers from DISA and other agencies said they will remain in Northern Virginia until they retire or the housing market rebounds and makes it easier for them to move. Thus, the arrival of BRAC-related expansion is expected to be a commuting event, placing a major strain on area roadways. And a lack of funds at the state level has meant many transportation upgrades will be slow to come.

"Sadly, when we started this process back in 2006, when banks had money, there was some assumption that we'd have lots of improvements made in time for this growth," said George Cardwell, a transportation administrator in the county's office of planning and zoning. "What's happened is that that money has not materialized the way we thought it would."

