

BRAC, Not Just for Defense Contractors

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By **CLAIRE LOUDER**, West County Chamber | December 21, 2010
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Why does the chamber spend so much time on BRAC – it's only going to benefit defense contractors, right?

After years of everyone talking about Base Realignment and Closure, I was surprised to hear this sentiment expressed at a recent chamber meeting. Nothing could be further from the truth!

As thousands of people move their offices to Anne Arundel County beginning in January, their demand for services will impact all aspects of the local economy. Though we don't expect them all to relocate their residences immediately (though they're definitely showing up in the real estate market), there are many services these new workers will find more convenient to access close to work.

For a start, few people would be expected to drive back to Northern Virginia for lunch – and they will get tired of the offerings on base quickly. This should increase support of existing restaurants and take-out places, as well as create demand for new ones. Luckily several Odenton Town Center projects are preleasing space as we speak for just such establishments. We actually know this is an area of specific interest to those relocating with the BRAC agencies, as one of the most frequent requests we get is for a list of area restaurants.

Accessing basic services such as dry cleaning, barbers and beauty salons/spas, fitness centers, shopping, and banks is all more likely to take place during the day, often on a lunch break. As workers are replaced and businesses grow, more of these workers will live in our area and demand for child-care services and senior care services will increase (the demographics of the incoming workers suggests some may be caring for elderly parents).

Medical and dental services are also more likely to be scheduled near work than home. Anne Arundel County has an outstanding selection of medical care options just outside the gates of Fort George G. Meade, with representation by Johns Hopkins Community Physicians, Baltimore Washington Medical Center (in Hanover), and Anne Arundel Medical Center (currently at Waugh Chapel Village). Dentists, chiropractors, physical therapists, and other auxiliary medical services are also nearby.

Of course, the impact on the real estate and development markets are a given – we're already starting to see increased activity in both, anecdotally related to BRAC and other Fort Meade growth. This has spurred development in the Odenton Town Center, Arundel Preserve, Village South at Waugh Chapel, Parkside, Arundel Gateway, and more, as well as sales of existing homes.

In fact, a study funded by the federal Office of Economic Adjustment and conducted by Sage Policy Group Inc. suggests that demand in Anne Arundel County will outstrip supply by 2015, particularly for affordable housing.

What does this mean for your business? If like many in the local area, you've been ignoring all the talk about BRAC because "that's just for defense contractors and developers," it's time to get informed! Make sure your business plan (you all have one, right, updated regularly?) is designed to take advantage of the changes in the market associated with the expanded workforce. Whatever your business, there's probably some aspect of BRAC from which you can benefit.

There are many sources of information on who's coming and what they'll be looking for. A good (and free!) place to start is the Anne Arundel County BRAC office's website, www.aacounty.org/BRAC. West County Chamber's website offers additional information links – just look under BRAC on our navigation bar.

For those who prefer to get their information more interactively, the West County Chamber will be offering monthly "BRAC Breakfast Briefs" for our members on the second Wednesday of every month at the chamber office. The first will be held at 9 a.m. Jan. 12 and is sponsored by Berkshire Property Management.

Finally, for those who want really detailed information, numerous organizations host half- and full-day seminars – watch for advertising in local newspapers.

However you choose to get your information, get informed and do it soon. Two hundred people a month will begin arriving at their desks on Fort Meade beginning in January, with almost 7,000 new workers in place by the end of the summer (not counting growth at the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command). You want their business – and they'll be looking for yours.

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Claire Louder is the president and CEO of the West Anne Arundel County Chamber of Commerce. E-mail her at clouder@westcountychamber.org.

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