

BRAC brings upheaval, opportunity to San Antonio
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Construction on the Installation Management Command campus at Fort Sam Houston is raising the dust with four buildings under complete renovation, one getting an addition, two being built from the ground up, and 2,400 people moving into new offices during the next two years.

“It’s been a year-long process to get all the building plans developed and the approvals granted for all of these projects,” IMCOM Transformation Office Program Manager Roy “R.J.” Holley said.

With one of the buildings half completed, and contracts being awarded for the rest, Fort Sam, as it is colloquially known, continues to grow.

Construction, however, is not new to San Antonio, known as Military City USA. From the early days of Spanish exploration and the transformation of the Alamo, to providing the cutting edge in battlefield healthcare training, San Antonio’s history is closely linked to military history.

However, the Base Realignment and Closure activities scheduled to occur in San Antonio through September 2011 could arguably be one of the city’s largest economic development projects.

San Antonio’s four military facilities – Lackland and Randolph Air Force Bases, Camp Bullis and FSH – are expected to receive 4,886 new personnel, 5,500 Family members, 9,000 additional students, along with \$2.1 billion in construction.

San Antonio is one of 12 locations worldwide where Department of Defense sites are combining to form joint bases. Under the 2005 BRAC Joint Basing plan for San Antonio, installation support functions at FSH will combine with those at Randolph and Lackland to support what will be the largest customer-based organization in the DoD when completed in 2011.

Restoration of historic structures on FSH will provide administrative space for about 3,000 military personnel and civilian employees. They will support a variety of realigned agencies and commands, including IMCOM, the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, and the Army Environmental Command. The Mission and Installation Contracting Command and the Network Enterprise Technology Command, including the 106th Signal Brigade, also will be stationed there.

All told, BRAC is expected to bring 9,000 employees to Fort Sam Houston.

These renovation projects include about two dozen structures, many of which are more than 75 years old and several that are more than a century old. As federal historic renovation efforts, the projects are within the National Historic Preservation Act parameters.

“One of the nicest things about these historical structures, built in the 1930s as regimental barracks, is the open balconies that will allow people to move between offices by going outside on the second and third floors,” Holley said about IMCOM headquarters. “The balconies face the summertime prevailing winds, allowing them to be nice and cool. A lot of business will probably be conducted on those balconies.”

If there is insufficient room on the balconies, the buildings are designed with 30 percent more meeting rooms and conference areas than normal design guidelines.

These historic structures are arranged in the shape of a square with a new 168,000 square foot IMCOM headquarters being constructed in the middle.

Holley oversees renovation of three buildings for IMCOM – including one for FMWRC and another for AEC. He also oversees construction of a fourth building for IMCOM, to be located inside the four outlying buildings on campus, the renovation of the old Sam Houston Theater for Army Entertainment Division, and construction of the MWR Academy.

Building 2264, the future home of Family and MWR Command, will begin renovation this November and be completed by May 2011.

In the meantime, 68 personnel, the majority of whom are relocating from the National Capital Region, will work at the FSH Community Club until the permanent lease space located off base becomes available in September.

IMCOM personnel moving to Fort Sam Houston this summer will experience some difficulty in accomplishing their daily work activities. But in two years the enormous amount of construction and the resulting consolidation of various departments will streamline workflow, reduce stress and contribute to an improved quality of life for Soldiers and Families.

"We're having growing pains, of course," said Bill Bradner, deputy Public Affairs officer and spokesperson for the Family and MWR Command. "Adapting to split operations is a challenge, and working through the IT issues has been frustrating, at times. But every day we're getting smarter and developing solutions to those challenges.

"We're looking forward to moving to the leased space this fall. Right now some of us are working on folding tables, taking our files and computers home every night, even sharing phones, copiers and printers. Moving to office space and establishing a more permanent infrastructure will be a huge step forward. Of course, there will be growing pains then, too. But the lessons we've learned making the move from Alexandria to Fort Sam should serve us well as we move into the leased space," Bradner said.

According to Bill Stickles, acting director of MWR Facilities, the new working spaces were based on the needs of each directorate.

"We were bound by certain building requirements," Stickles noted, "but we wanted to be sure each directorate would not be split up on different floors. This was achieved through the efforts of our designer, Haimanot Abbit."

As of August 2009, the renovation of building 2265, which will house the FSH Directorate of Information Management and Headquarters IMCOM G6, is halfway completed, with a June 2010 target for completion.

Building 2266, which will house Headquarters IMCOM G1, G5 and IG, began renovation in July, with expected completion by May 2011. It should be mission ready 60 days later.

Building 2263, home to Army Environmental Command, will begin renovation this October with expected completion by 2011.

Those reporting for duty with AEC this year and next will work in Building 2000, beginning this December, until their new space is ready. This structure was built in 1908 to serve as the installation's new hospital, replacing the hospital that had been constructed in 1886.

"Each of the buildings has basements where conference rooms, training rooms, locker rooms with showers, and classrooms are being built," Holley said.

The three-story structure to be built in the middle of these buildings, on the original parade ground, will house the IMCOM Command Group, numbering about 900 people, bringing

the total number to 2,400 moving onto the IMCOM campus. Construction will begin in November, with completion by June 2011.

Although not visible when driving by the campus, it will be historically accurate and match the other buildings. A special Army Alternate Procedures agreement outlines more specific management practices to ensure the visual character of the buildings is maintained. Under this agreement, project teams consult regularly with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Texas Historical Commission.

“Renovation projects like these require extraordinary effort because intricate architectural features must be preserved to achieve an appearance that is true to the original designs,” said David Thomas, director of the Joint Program Management Office, which is overseeing the San Antonio BRAC construction and renovation program. “Extra care and diligence are also necessary in carrying out the work because of the delicate state of some of these buildings.”

All of the historic structures require extensive rehabilitation to become suitable for their new tenants. In most cases, existing interior partitions, electrical wiring, plumbing, climate control systems, and interior and exterior lighting fixtures need to be replaced. Stairways, ceilings, wooden floors, structural roof members, interior and exterior doors and windows are also being repaired, refinished or replaced.

“These buildings were meant to last,” Holley said. “The original clay tile roofs will remain as they are, and the stucco on the outside walls, built with cinderblock and brick, only needed a paint job.”

During the 1970s, the Army remodeled the structures as two-man rooms from traditional barracks. The rest of the renovation of these Mediterranean-style buildings will help meet anti-terrorism/force protection requirements, such as blast-proof windows designed to appear as the originals, and the addition of fiberglass “band aids” to the concrete floors designed for “progressive collapse,” among others.

Fort Sam Houston, with construction beginning in 1876, is the ninth oldest Army installation with the most historic structures of any active military installation in America.

“The whole complex is a cultural conservation district,” Holley said. “In addition, nice micro parks will be landscaped between the buildings with Texas vegetation local to this San Antonio river basin, such as Lantana that grows six feet high with yellow flowers, lots of cactus, desert palms, and native live oaks.”

To conserve water, irrigation for the plants will be provided by an underground cistern that captures rain water.

“But the crown jewel will be the renovation of Building 2270 – the Fort Sam Houston Theatre, to its original grandeur,” Holley said. “Built in 1935, this movie theatre is the first one the Army built in the United States.

“On the inside, it looks a whole like the Warner Brothers’ theaters built around the country in the early 1900s. After completion, we’ll hang original film posters throughout,” Holley said. “Even the ticket booth in the front will have a mannequin inside, ready to take your money for the latest show.”

A portion of theatre will be overhauled and the end product will feature a three-story structure with an 80-foot “fly tower” that will accommodate the raising and lowering of stage sets. The first floor will extend the stage, which only will be used as a rehearsal hall. The other floors will house offices and recording studios.

The 1,100-seat theater will be reduced to an 800-seat theater to allow the balcony to hold lighting and sound equipment. A nearby warehouse will be used for construction of sets, theater maintenance and equipment storage.

The MWR Academy will be built in a field behind the IMCOM complex, on the other side of Wilson Street, with parking for 500.

For the entire IMCOM campus there will be 2,100 parking spaces, mostly located along three blocks of Stanley Road, which runs parallel to Wilson.

“All new construction in this campus within the San Antonio river basin will appear the same, architecturally, so there’ll be no mistaking where IMCOM is located,” Holley said.

In the fall of 2011, after the dust settles from yet another upheaval at Fort Sam, the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, and the military not only will benefit from a strengthened economy and revitalized neighborhoods, but those who have moved into this historical military city as a result of BRAC will find a sense of community and revitalized spirit.

According to Bradner, the move back onto Fort Sam in 2011 will unite “our Family and we’ll be working side by side supporting the Army Family.

“We’ll probably face a number of challenges during that transition, too, but the end result will be greatly improved efficiency and smoother operations across the board,” Bradner said.