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Military construction boom prompts pleas for help

By Henry Cuningham
Military editor

DURHAM — Army, Navy and Marine officials on Wednesday begged civilian contractors to help them tackle the massive amount of military construction in southeastern North Carolina in coming years.

“The bottom line is, we need your help,” Brig. Gen. Joseph Schroedel told about 500 people at the 2008 N.C. Military Construction Summit at the Durham Marriott Convention Center. The Fayetteville-based N.C. Military Business Center and North Carolina Military Foundation of Raleigh sponsored the event, which was sold out.

Army growth at Fort Bragg and Camp Mackall, along with Marine growth in eastern North Carolina, will create \$5 billion to \$7 billion in military construction projects.

“I wish I had an ‘Uncle Sam needs you’ sign right now, because we need you,” Schroedel said. “We need every one of you. We’ve got more work than we can handle. So we’ve got to help you get in there to help us.”

Schroedel is commanding general of the South Atlantic Division of the Army Corps of Engineers, which oversees building at Fort Bragg and around the southeastern United States.

Fort Bragg has a building boom due in large part to base realignment and initiatives to increase special operations forces and the Army overall. The Army is continuing to replace the 82nd Airborne Division’s barracks that were built in the 1950s.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for Dec. 8 at Fort Bragg for the \$288.5 million complex for the headquarters of Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command. The 2005 Base Closure and Realignment law mandates that the commands must move from Fort McPherson in south Atlanta in less than three years.

Greg Bean, Fort Bragg’s director of public works, said the Army post has about \$2.8 billion of construction between 2005 and 2015. There is repair and restoration work to be done, which can serve as “starter projects” for contractors who are unfamiliar with working with the federal government.

There is no tolerance, Bean said, for time delays or cost overruns.

Barracks that are being built or renovated must be ready for soldiers to occupy immediately upon their return from Iraq and Afghanistan. Under federal law, the BRAC projects must be finished by Sept. 15, 2011.

The Navy has a high demand for builders, with projects at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base at Jacksonville, New River Marine Corps Air Station and Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station at Havelock. The expansion of the Marine Corps, officials said, will bring more than 11,000 more Marines to North Carolina.

“We are trying to be a lot more flexible than you have ever seen the Corps, for sure,” Schroedel said.

The Army, he said, offers training sessions to help civilian contractors learn how to do business with the federal government.

“Lots of work,” Schroedel said. “We are looking for quality, and partner up and team up with folks and get on board and come help us out, because our soldiers need you.”

In recent years, civilian contractors have been less willing to take on military projects, said Scott Dorney, executive director of the N.C. Military Business Center.

“There was a lot of work going on in the commercial sector, the industrial sector, (kindergarten through 12th grade), universities, bonds,” Dorney said. “There was a lot of construction work. Certainly, with the downturn in the economy, we’ve seen a whole lot more interest among contractors in North Carolina in military construction.”

More information

For more information about opportunities with the military, call the N.C. Military Business Center at 323-4824.

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