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New Fort Benning biz park to be defense hub

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Urvaksh Karkaria](#) Staff Writer

A \$72 million business park is being planned near Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga., that could employ more than 1,000 within five years.

Development of the 1.4 million-square-foot office park is being fueled by the growth of the adjacent army base. The 184,000-acre Fort Benning is undergoing a \$3.5 billion expansion as part of the **U.S. Army's** Base Realignment and Closure initiatives.

The Army is relocating its Armor School from Fort Knox in Kentucky to Fort Benning, which already houses the Army's Infantry School and is home to the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

The Fort Benning expansion is expected to create more than 11,000 jobs among active-duty soldiers, Department of Defense civilians and contractors.

The armor and infantry schools have a significant number of private contractors that, among other things, supply military equipment and weapons and provide technical training, former Fort Benning commander Carmen Cavezza said.

"There'll be an influx of new contractors in the area," the retired lieutenant general said. "The proximity of that site, right next to Fort Benning, makes it highly desirable for these guys."

Columbus State University, which is a partner in the proposed business park and owns the land, could eventually locate classrooms there.

Benning Technology Park has drawn interest from about 40 companies, said Jake Flournoy, a vice president with **Flournoy Development Co.**, the park's developer.

Tenants will include a few large defense companies and several subcontractors, with whom they partner with on military contracts.

Military contracts "are being designed specifically ... to encourage the integration of smaller business with the larger lead names," Flournoy said.

The park will include a combination of office space, research and development centers and some warehouse space.

Benning Technology Park targets technology and defense companies — both strategic industries for Columbus economic development officials.

An expanding Fort Benning makes Columbus an even more attractive destination for defense contractors, said Mike Gaymon, president and CEO at Greater Columbus Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

The relocation of the armor training school from Fort Knox is likely to make Columbus a destination for the dozens of private military contractors that supply technology and parts for tanks and armored vehicles, such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

In anticipation of the Armor School's relocation, the Columbus Chamber is recruiting defense contractors from Fort Knox and marketing local assets, such as the technology park.

Defense companies typically like to locate in clusters, Gaymon said. The proposed tech park, located "right at the mouth of Fort Benning," makes it an attractive destination, he said.

The 173-acre Benning Technology Park is expected to have an initial 100,000-square-foot building completed by fall 2011. The park will include multi-tenant buildings.

Gaymon expects the park to attract a number of high-tech companies — and jobs — as the military

adopts gaming and simulation technology to train soldiers more affordably.

Tremendous growth industry

It costs about \$960 to drive a Bradley a mile, the Chamber's Gaymon said.

"We can drive a simulated Bradley a million miles, for pennies," he said. "So, the whole simulation industry, we think, will be a tremendous growth industry in our region."

The proposed park would be a job engine, helping provide employment to the Columbus region's growing population, said Tom Helton, vice president for business and finance at Columbus State University.

The businesses that the park would attract, Helton said, could also help retain Columbus State graduates in the region and provide internships for current students.

Benning Technology Park's biggest selling feature is its location — near Interstate 185.

"It's literally outside the [base's] gates," Flournoy said. "For suppliers, the park offers a significant logistics advantage."

Flournoy is bullish on filling up the park.

"Fort Benning is going to do nothing but grow," he said. "The question is, how quickly."

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