

Case Study

**Columbus, Georgia: Civilian-Military Relationships
Spawn Economic Development**

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Case Study

Overview Columbus, Georgia: Civilian-Military Relationships Spawn Economic Development

As the 1990s approached, Columbus, Georgia knew that military base realignments and closures were about to happen. Rather than wait for the U.S. Department of Defense to make its decision, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce took a proactive position. Specifically, through the Military Affairs & Commercial Development and Economic Development departments, the chamber partnered with the military community at Fort Benning to leverage their unique asset (i.e., strong civilian-military relationships) to reach three key objectives.

One, the chamber and Fort Benning have partnered to support the work force needs of new and existing industry. Two, they have joined forces to resolve the area's problematic shortage of land for industrial development. Three, they have worked together to bolster Fort Benning's value in Columbus.

The joint venture between the civilian and military communities in the greater Columbus area has yielded several benefits. New and existing businesses have created thousands of jobs and invested millions of new capital while soldiers and their families have realized new economic opportunities. Land is now available to meet the rising demand for industrial space. Instead of losing units during the 1990s, Fort Benning has gained military operations.

Conditions Leading to the Practice

The Columbus Chamber of Commerce's relationship with the military dates back to the beginning of this century. In 1917, a chamber of commerce delegation was sent to Washington, D.C. to compete for a new military installation. In 1918, the U.S. Secretary of War awarded Columbus, Georgia the installation - Camp Benning. By 1922, Camp Benning was redesignated as Fort Benning, a permanent military installation. Since then, numerous units have been added to Fort Benning, even in the 1990s when base realignment and closures were in effect across the country.

Fort Benning is by far the greater Columbus area's largest employer. As of June 1999, it employed 22,284 military personnel and 7,781 civilians. There are also approximately 52,298 family members of soldiers serving at Fort Benning who have access to various military services. Therefore, the economic impact of Fort Benning on the area is significant.

Fort Benning also draws in a sizable transient population to the Greater Columbus area. It has been home to the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School since 1941. In

1982, the U.S. Army Infantry Center was established at Fort Benning, where all soldiers in the U.S. Army must complete their basic training. In 1984, the U.S. Army School of Americas, a training institution for Latin American military officers and government civilian personnel, opened at Fort Benning.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Fort Benning, and leaders in the greater Columbus area recognized the importance of a military operation's positioning within a community to its long-term sustainability. They refocused their efforts on strengthening the three factors that affect such positioning - civilian-military relationships, quality of life, and military capacity.

At the same time, greater Columbus faced a shortage of land for industrial development. Fort Benning, however, owned a substantial amount of undeveloped land. Greater coordination among the civilian and military sectors was required for the metro area's future economic development.

The desire to diversify the Greater Columbus area's industry base beyond government/military and manufacturing operations also led to strengthening civilian and military relationships. The chamber recognized that the highly skilled, drug-free work force provided by Fort Benning gave the Greater Columbus area a comparative advantage for post-industrial and high-tech industries. Not only would leveraging this advantage yield significant economic development benefits for the communities, but it also would help military personnel with their transition to civilian life.

Organization

Two leading organizations foster and coordinate civilian-military relations – the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and the Civilian and Military Council. Both organizations meet monthly.

The Columbus Chamber of Commerce works with Fort Benning through its Military Affairs & Commercial Development and the Economic Development departments. Both department heads are former military officers.

- The Military Affairs & Commercial Development Department created the Military Affairs Committee in 1992 as a think tank for airing problems, discussing solutions and providing updates on military-related activities. The committee is responsible for fostering strong relations between Columbus and Fort Benning. The committee's membership is composed of volunteers representing the military, business, civic, and government sectors of the community.
- The chamber's Economic Development Department is the official economic development agency for the city and its four-county metropolitan area. Since

1992, it has invited the Job Assistance Center at Fort Benning to participate in business development initiatives.

The Civilian and Military Council was established in 1946 by Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel, who had once commanded Fort Benning. The purpose of the council is to solve problems that exist in the relationships between soldiers, Fort Benning, the City of Columbus, Phenix City and their citizens. The chairperson of the Civilian and Military Council also serves as the chairperson of the Chamber's Military Affairs Committee to foster community wide collaboration.

The Practice in Operation

In 1993, the Columbus chamber, through its "MPower" campaign, raised \$400,000 for promotional and marketing activities. The funds were allocated to the Land Exchange Program and other activities by the Military Affairs & Commercial Development and Economic Development departments. The chamber employs 23 individuals. One person staffs the Military Affairs & Commercial Development Department. The Economic Development Department includes seven staff members.

- **Job Assistance.** When a company requests a visit with the chamber, the chamber's Economic Development Department automatically assembles a project team comprising representatives from area utilities, real estate offices, educational institutions, financing entities, the Georgia Department of Labor, and the Job Assistance Center at Fort Benning.

The Job Assistance Center, created in 1992, is part of the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). The center provides extensive outplacement services to departing soldiers and their families through workshops that help with identifying objectives, writing resumes and cover letters, identifying job opportunities in the open and hidden markets, networking, using electronic database tools, interviewing, evaluating job offers and negotiating salaries and benefits. After attending the workshops, each participant is assigned a counselor who expands on the material already provided, and works one-on-one in conducting an effective job search.

The chamber's Economic Development Department first invited the Job Assistance Center to the negotiation table with a prospect in 1992 because the center is best acquainted with the skills of those separating from the military. The Job Assistance Center has since been considered a permanent part of the economic development team. The Economic Development Department and Job Assistance Center recognize that the many of the skills required by the military resemble those required by private-sector employers. However, the language used by the military is as complex to private-sector employers as any foreign language.

These two entities help translate the military language into private sector language. For example, in military language, a person may be described as an E5 and 13 Alpha in FDC of a DS Unit. In private sector language, this person is a Sergeant in the Fire Detection Center of a Direct Support Unit who programs in and understands the functions of COBOL for state-of-the-art personal computers. With the limited number of available COBOL programmers, companies preparing Y2K remediation programs would find this person's skills quite valuable.

The Job Assistance Center estimates that approximately 3,000 soldiers left Fort Benning in 1998 and reports that another 3,000 are estimated to leave by year-end 1999. Family members of military personnel are also a potential work force. As of May 1999, approximately 3,600 military spouses were unemployed in Columbus. Each month, the Job Assistance Center provides the chamber's Economic Development Department with projection data on departing soldiers by skill type.

- **Land Exchange.** The Land Exchange program was initiated by the chamber's Military Affairs Department in 1989. Its purpose is to address the area's shortage of land by acquiring real property for long-term industrial and landfill development. The Military Affairs Committee has worked to implement the program over a 10-year period by holding meetings to resolve conflicts, contributing volunteer assistance, and lobbying public officials.

Through the Land Exchange Program, the City of Columbus aimed to acquire 3,000 acres of undeveloped land from Fort Benning. In exchange, Chattahoochee County offered Fort Benning 3,200 acres. In 1990, at the request of the Columbus chamber, then-Senator Sam Nunn led the charge to allow an exchange of land between Fort Benning and Columbus. These efforts resulted in approval by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division for landfill development and adoption of appropriate state and federal regulations to permit the land exchange.

- **Activities to Bolster Fort Benning's Value.** A primary goal of the Military Affairs Committee is to help Fort Benning increase its military capacity through attracting new units or missions. The Military Affairs Committee markets Fort Benning and Columbus to U.S. Department of Defense individuals and teams who participate in base relocation and closure decisions. Because by law a military base cannot voice a public position, the chamber, through the efforts of the committee, serves as a public relations agent on behalf of Fort Benning. For example, it helps Fort Benning prepare proposals, presentation materials, videos and other communications materials that discuss Fort Benning's qualities and strengths.

Outcomes

Economic Development and Job Assistance Center

➤ **Job Assistance Center Furthers Business Relocation and Expansion.**

According to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, the Job Assistance Center at Fort Benning has since 1993 been directly involved with assisting 72 of the 92 companies expanding or locating in the greater Columbus area with their work force needs. Most of these companies (72 percent) expanded their existing operations, signaling the value that the partnership between the chamber and Job Assistance Center brings to existing industry. These companies accounted for more than 9,300 jobs and invested over \$919.7 million. (See Appendix.)

Fort Benning veterans hold various positions throughout greater Columbus. In addition to industry leaders such as Total Systems, AFLAC, Pratt & Whitney, and BellSouth, Fort Benning has also supplied talent to a number of civic and public service organizations (e.g., Goodwill, United Way, Uptown Columbus, Columbus Chamber of Commerce, police department, hospital).

➤ **Overall Economic Profile Improved.** Although civilian-military relationships are not the sole impetus to the economic development in greater Columbus, the area's economy has grown and diversified since 1970.

In the 1980s, Columbus was a two-industry town, dominated by government/military and manufacturing employment. Today, it has a diversified industry base and has shifted well into the post-industrial economy. According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the Columbus services sector grew 60.7 percent from 1990 to 1998, in terms of jobs available. The finance, insurance, and real estate sector grew 33.9 percent. The retail sector, growing 23.2 percent, benefited from the area's population growth, military retention, and increased transient population traffic. Approximately 118,500 persons are employed in Columbus, a 19.3 percent increase since 1990. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, per capita income increased 41.3 percent since 1990 to \$20,929, as of 1997.

Land Exchange Program

➤ **Land Acquired for Future Industrial and Economic Development.**

Nearing the end of a ten-year land exchange program, the City of Columbus has gained 2,100 total acres from Fort Benning for future development. Approximately 600 acres have been designated for parks and recreational development and 1,400 acres are set aside for future industrial park development. In addition to the 2,100 acres, another 350 acres are designated for landfill development.

Activities to Bolster Fort Benning's Value

- **New Units Added to Fort Benning.** Although military installations across the country have lost units during this decade, Fort Benning has grown in military capacity. In 1996, Fort Benning was selected as the site for the Regional Civilian Personnel Center, one of four such centers in the nation. The center houses staff members who support twenty military installations in the Southeast. In addition, the Basic Combat Training (BCT) Brigade was set up at Fort Benning during the first half of 1999. This brigade has added 600 full-time military personnel to the area. Also, an estimated 12,000 trainees will attend the brigade annually.

- **Fort Benning Dubbed “An Army Community of Excellence.”** As a testimonial to the value of Fort Benning as a military installation and as a military community, the base has received numerous awards in recent years. In 1997, Fort Benning received the Presidential Award for Quality, the highest award for quality achievement in the federal government. In 1994, 1995, 1997 and 1999, Fort Benning received the Best Installation in the Army, Commander in Chief (CINC) Award. Fort Benning also has received the Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence every year since 1993.

Conclusion

The Columbus Chamber of Commerce's relationship with Fort Benning has become a model for how to leverage military assets to promote economic development. These relationships have provided Columbus with a drug-free and highly skilled work force for companies with diverse labor needs, as well as land for future development. In turn, Fort Benning has been awarded new units and recognition as a result of its greater positioning within the community.

What's next for Columbus, Georgia? To ensure Fort Benning's future as a sustainable military operation, the chamber and Fort Benning will continue to work on the initiatives described herein to support economic development and strengthen Fort Benning's foothold in the community. Also, the Chamber and Fort Benning are working with the National Infantry Association to consolidate over 350 small infantry units across the country into one association that will meet annually in Fort Benning. The National Infantry Association president estimates that this effort will bring more than 1 million visitors to Fort Benning per year. The chamber is also working with Fort Benning and the Smithsonian Institution to build a national-level museum in Columbus that will tell the Fort Benning story. The tourism impact of this effort could be significant.

Acknowledgements

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Chronology

- 1917 Columbus, Georgia sent chamber of commerce delegation to Washington, D.C. to compete for new military installation.
- 1918 U.S. Secretary of War approved establishment of a military installation in Columbus, Georgia.
First army personnel arrived, Camp Benning constructed.
- 1922 Camp Benning redesignated as Fort Benning, a permanent military installation.
- 1941 Officer Candidate School created.
- 1946 Fort Benning Commanding General John W. O'Daniel created Civilian and Military Council.
- 1982 U.S. Army Infantry Training Center formed at Fort Benning.
- 1984 U.S. Army School of the Americas relocated to Fort Benning.
- 1989 Land Exchange Program initiated by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce
- 1992 U.S. Department of Defense created Job Assistance Center at Fort Benning.
Columbus Chamber of Commerce creates Military Affairs Committee.
Columbus Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Department initiated partnership with Job Assistance Center at Fort Benning.
- 1993 Tri-Community Action Plan conceived by Chief of Staff of the Infantry Center and Garrison Commander at Fort Benning.
Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.
- 1994 Fort Benning received Best Installation in the Army, Commander in Chief (CINC) Award.

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- 1995 Fort Benning received Best Installation in the Army, Commander in Chief (CINC) Award.
- Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.
- 1996 Fort Benning selected as site for Regional Civilian Personnel Center (one of four such centers in the nation).
- Construction of new bike/walk trail from Fort Benning to Columbus World Trade Center completed and designated as RiverWalk South.
- Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.
- 1997 Fort Benning received Presidential Award for Quality, the highest award for quality achievement in Federal Government.
- Fort Benning received Best Installation in the Army, Commander in Chief (CINC) Award.
- Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.
- 1998 Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.
- 1999 Basic Combat Training (BCT) Brigade established at Fort Benning.
- Fort Benning received Best Installation in the Army, Commander in Chief (CINC) Award.
- Fort Benning received Chief of Staff, Army Community of Excellence (ACOE) Award for Installation of Excellence.

Appendix

Notes: (1) Companies with (E) following their name have expanded existing operations. All other companies established new operations. (2) All jobs and investment figures have been reported by the companies. (3) Jobs and investment figures reflect total to date as of July 1999

Expanding or Locating Companies

Company	Year	Jobs	Investment
Precision Components International (E)	1999		\$20,000,000
MBIA (E)	1999		\$5,000,000
BellSouth	1999	200	\$1,200,000
Carl Gregory (E)	1999	40	\$13,000,000
Rivertown Ford (E)	1999	20	
Fieldbrook Farms	1999	90	\$3,000,000
Intermet	1999	300	\$35,000,000
Total Systems, CRIP II (E)	1998	75	\$22,000,000
Auten Poultry and Food Service (E)	1998	25	\$1,500,000
Total Systems, Office Campus (E)	1998		\$10,000,000
AFLAC (E)	1998	200	\$4,900,000
Tom's Foods (E)	1998	50	\$6,000,000
CB&T (E)	1998	200	\$2,500,000
Heritage Hills Alzheimer Assisted Care	1998	30	\$3,500,000
Leon's Fabrics (E)	1997	5	\$1,500,000
Green Point Financial Corp.	1997	150	\$4,000,000
Swift/Marubini (E)	1997	350	\$80,000,000
AFLAC (E)	1997	200	\$25,000,000
BlueCross BlueShield (E)	1997	40	\$4,400,000
KNOLOGY	1997	150	\$40,000,000
FEDEX (E)	1997	20	\$2,000,000
Char-Broil (E)	1997	150	\$26,000,000

Expanding or Locating Companies (cont'd)

Company	Year	Jobs	Investment
Ruco-Polymer (E)	1997	6	\$1,000,000
PCI (E)	1997	150	\$14,000,000
Kysor Warren (E)	1997	100	
MBIA (E)	1997	25	
Polychrome (E)	1997	15	\$15,000,000
InterState Electrical (E)	1997	10	\$1,500,000
Morningside Assisted Care	1997	20	\$2,500,000
Total Systems, Total Solutions (E)	1997	100	
Espire	1996	10	\$6,000,000
Pratt & Whitney – JT*D	1996	200	\$32,000,000
Southern Phenix Textiles (E)	1996	32	\$1,230,000
Total Systems, Office Campus (E)	1996	2,500	\$100,000,000
Total Systems North Center (E)	1996	100	\$30,000,000
Lincoln Marketing (E)	1996	50	\$6,000,000
Columbus Productions (E)	1996	50	\$5,000,000
Goody Products (E)	1996	5	\$3,000,000
Jay Automotive (E)	1996	15	\$8,000,000
Kysor/Warren (E)	1996	200	\$6,600,000
Char Broil (E)	1995	250	\$20,000,000
MBIA (MD)	1995	30	\$15,000,000
Pace Industries	1995	600	\$25,000,000
Regional Civilian Personnel Ctr. @ Ft. Benning	1995	165	
Swift Plant #1 (E)	1995	90	\$60,000,000
TeleServices Resources	1995	315	\$3,000,000
Textron (E)	1995	100	\$500,000
Total Systems, CRIP (E)	1995	350	\$13,700,000
AFLAC (E)	1994	120	\$26,000,000
AT&T Universal Bank	1994	10	
BC/BS of GA (E)	1994	180	\$9,000,000
Charbroil, Inc. (E)	1994	10	\$2,500,000
Citizen's Mortgage	1994	185	\$3,500,000
Columbus Foundries/CPM (E)	1994	50	\$1,000,000
Columbus Regional HCS (E)	1994		\$24,600,000
J H Williams (E)	1994		\$1,000,000
Johnson Controls, Inc.	1994	15	\$500,000
MBIA Corp. HQ	1994	10	
MBIA Lithium Plant	1994	100	\$30,000,000
Oneda (E)	1994	12	\$2,000,000
Sherman Concrete (E)	1994		\$2,600,000
Spartan Realtree (E)	1994	16	\$5,000,000
Swift Spinning (E)	1994	70	\$20,000,000
Total Systems Services (E)	1994	300	\$1,000,000
Cail Tool & Machining (E)	1993	5	\$500,000
Columbus Regional (E)	1993		\$17,000,000
Lincoln Marketing	1993	180	\$2,000,000
Polychrome (E)	1993	35	\$8,000,000
Ruco Polymer Corp.	1993	100	\$20,000,000
Swift Spinning (E)	1993	50	\$25,000,000
Swift Textiles (E)	1993	90	\$11,300,000
Unijax Sloan (E)	1993	35	\$1,500,000
Wellington Sears Co. (E)	1993	35	\$26,200,000
Total 1993 - 1999		9,391	\$919,730,000

Source: Columbus Chamber of Commerce, July 1999