

Navy helping Picatinny Arsenal grow

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After downsizing during the 1980s and 1990s, and once considered for closure with other bases around the country, Picatinny Arsenal is now growing.

The first of 220 new engineering and science jobs with a new U.S. Navy division are now being filled.

Elsewhere on the installation, two large defense technology companies have recently signed long-term office leases, as part of a public-private collaboration.

By contrast, Fort Monmouth, a base near Eatontown that works to develop software and communications technology for the U.S. Army, is scheduled to close with operations and jobs moving to Aberdeen, Md. by 2011. The changes were generated by the Base Realignment and Closure Act in 2005, an effort to consolidate military facilities.

Picatinny Arsenal, with 6,500 acres of land, and more than a million square feet of indoor research space, will continue to occupy the commercially valuable land as a proving range and research and development site for munitions and weapons for the military, as

has been done there since the Revolutionary War.

Significant among the recent changes is the return of the Navy, which hasn't had a presence at the arsenal since the 1890s. The Naval Surface Warfare Center is bringing to Picatinny divisions from the seven locations around the country that research and develop the guns and ship-defense systems used by the Navy, as well as the systems used to transport ammunition.

"We will hire a few senior-level engineers," said David Rogers, the Navy transition manager at Picatinny, "and the majority of the hires will be new kids out of college."

So far new employees have included recent engineering and science graduates from New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers University, he said. The Navy is expecting to conduct the bulk of hiring in 2010 and 2011. Five new buildings will be constructed and one will be refurbished, said Rogers.

In other upgrades, office space for BAE Systems and Raytheon, two large defense contractors with field offices around the world, have already been renovated.

BAE will move in this weekend for the beginning of a long-term lease on a 2,700-square-foot office, said Brian Banaszynski, vice-president of leasing for Advance Realty in New Jersey. Advance is managing the development of the Picatinny Applied Research Campus, an ambitious public-private partnership that aims to bring civilian defense technology companies to take up residence at Picatinny.

The project had struggled this past year to find clients in a poor economic climate.

Raytheon is consolidating its New Jersey operations at Picatinny to continue a contract with the Army on the development of the Excalibur precision-guided artillery system.

Two other companies signed leases within the last year, and Advance Realty is negotiating with other companies to fill the remaining space in the building located in the heart of Picatinny, he said.

"As long as things continue at Picatinny all these corporations are committed to having a presence there and contribute to the mission," said Banaszynski.