

BRAC families will 'invade' Maryland

Expect more people in the pews in 2011, thanks to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) initiative, which will bring an estimated 28,176 new households to Maryland.

Business managers from Baltimore-area parishes and schools filled an Archdiocesan workshop Oct. 18 that featured speakers from Harford, Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties and Baltimore City addressing the impact of BRAC.

Nationally, BRAC will close some bases and consolidate operations at others; Maryland was a big winner with both Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford County and Fort George G. Meade in Anne Arundel County gaining thousands of jobs.

Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, eastern vicar, who oversees parishes in the affected areas, said the church is working under the assumption that at least one-third of the families will be Catholic.

"I think it's crucial in our planning for the future that we include as much BRAC information as we can get," he said.

"This is the first information I've had about BRAC in this context," said Mary Ellen Bates, business manager for St. Margaret, Bel Air. "It adds information and clarity and lets us plan - my parish is doing strategic planning right now, so it's a great time to get this information."

Denise Carnaggio, technical development manager for Harford County, said Aberdeen Proving Ground currently has more than 13,000 employees. It will gain another 9,154 on the post itself, plus at least another 7,231 off-post contractor positions. The total number of new jobs will be between 16,253 and 21,232, bringing employment at Aberdeen to between 27,000 and 32,000 jobs.

Harford County is expecting about 5,000 new households, with 3,385 school-age children. The average age of the incoming workers will be 46, and their average income is \$86,000.

The biggest planning concern, Ms. Carnaggio said, is transportation. "It's a constant need to be on top of everything with transportation," she said, noting that a new Route 715 extension will lead to I-95, and the county is looking at MARC rail as a key component.

The story is similar in western Anne Arundel County, where Fort Meade will gain 5,695 jobs, NSA will grow by more than 4,000 jobs and the area will gain another 12,000 related jobs, for a total of 22,000 jobs.

Robert C. Leib, special assistant for BRAC for Anne Arundel County, said about 10,679 households are expected at Fort Meade with another 4,457 throughout the county. The average age of the worker will be 47 to 48, with an average salary of \$97,000.

Although a few employees have trickled in, the moves will begin in 2009 and must be completed by 2011.

Stella Blair, development director at St. Jane Frances School, Pasadena, said her school is expecting BRAC families.

"I attend every BRAC seminar that I hear about," she said.

But the numbers can't tell the personal decisions each family must make. If they have children settled in school in another state, will the worker choose to live here in an apartment and head home on the weekends? If they're in northern Virginia, will they opt to commute two hours rather than move? If their children are grown, will they want empty nester housing? Will they want to put their children in a Catholic school? In CCD? Will they join a parish?

Ms. Carnaggio said that when she met with employees at Fort Monmouth, N.J., who will be moving here, "there was a lot of interest in Catholic schools - a lot."