

## National Guard to build shared headquarters (The News Journal)

By ANGIE BASIOUNY

The News Journal

A project that has spent nearly a decade on the drawing board is finally becoming a reality for the Delaware National Guard as the unit prepares to build a \$42 million headquarters it will share for the first time with the Naval Reserve.

Guard officials will host a signing ceremony Tuesday to mark the commitment of federal funds for the new joint headquarters, which they said will consolidate operations and improve efficiency.

"It seems like I've been working on this forever," said Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala, overall commander of the guard. "It's something I've been dreaming about for a long time."

Construction on the 106,000-square-foot building is expected to begin in 2010, he said. It will stand on 10 acres inside the New Castle Airport, the guard's headquarters.

The building will serve as the administrative hub for the Delaware Army and Air National Guards and the Naval Reserve. The two guard units currently share headquarters space in a former elementary school in the Pike Creek community of Sherwood Park, while the Naval Reserve is in an aging building along Kirkwood Highway.

The old school leaves much to be desired, Vavala said.

"We've been in it since 1980 and we've certainly outgrown it," he said. "And it looks like a school, so it doesn't give you the impression you're looking for with a military headquarters."

Army Guard Master Sgt. Arnold O'Sullivan, who has been working on the project, said the building will improve efficiency because it will allow each unit to share what they have in common -- classrooms, parking lots, a gym and space for drills.

"We may have different missions, but there are certain things we use that are similar," he said. "All that common area can be used by those entities and save us money. It's a real win-win for the taxpayers of Delaware and for the United States."

Vavala also stressed the economic impact the project will have on Delaware. He expects many of the contracts for construction and technology will go to local companies.

"It doesn't take a brain surgeon to understand we're in some pretty tough economic times," he said. "This is a \$42 million project we're bringing into the state."

There's yet another plus for Delaware, O'Sullivan said.

Typically, the financial burden for such projects are shared, with the state kicking in 25 percent of construction costs. But the U.S. Department of Defense is footing the entire bill because the Naval Reserve is going under the same roof as the guard units.

"By adding the \$12 million the Navy is bringing into this, the federal government sees this as a federal project and it becomes fully funded," O'Sullivan said. "We're saving Delaware a big, big chunk of money."

Vavala thanked the state's congressional delegation -- Democrat Sens. Joe Biden and Tom Carper, and Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Castle -- for working for years to secure the money and said he's not worried the government will change its mind because of a tight economy. The money already has been earmarked, he said.

Both guard units are seeing a steady flow of federal dollars for facility upgrades. The Air Guard broke ground last month on a \$33 million, three-year project to build a new maintenance hanger for its C-130 transport aircraft.

The unit also has completed construction of a \$1.5 million medical training facility and a \$2 million security forces building. A \$10.8 million aircraft parking ramp was done a few years ago, along with a \$7 million squadron operations and aeromedical facility. And construction is under way for a \$1.5 million fuel depot.

The Army Guard is expanding with a \$25 million project to build better hangars to house and maintain aircraft, including its fleet of Black Hawk helicopters.

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