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JOBS IN THE MIDLANDS

Area can absorb base growth

Study says jobs available in Midlands for military spouses

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The Columbia area should have enough jobs for spouses of troops who will be added to three Midlands military bases in the next two years, a report released Wednesday said. "Demand for labor in the ... Midlands region should be more than sufficient to absorb the expected dependents of military personnel," said the study prepared for the Midlands Workforce Development Board.

The study said the region will need 419 to 548 new jobs for military spouses moving to Fort Jackson, McEntire Joint National Guard Station and Shaw Air Force Base. That is about half of the number of jobs local leaders said they believed would be needed.

"I really expected a little different slant," board director Bonnie Austin said. The increase in workers is much smaller than originally anticipated when the Pentagon announced last May its recommendations for the Base Realignment and Closure commission, commonly referred to as BRAC.

Beginning October 2007, about 1,900 troops will begin moving to the three bases from other military bases. The troops, though, will not come at once "with no single 'shock'" to the work force, the study added. One reason for the lower numbers is that fewer military spouses moving to Shaw will need jobs, said Dan Broun of Regional Technology Strategies, a work force consultant from Carrboro, N.C.

Shaw, according to the study, is projected to gain 806 military personnel with relocation of the 3rd Army headquarters from Atlanta. About a third of the military spouses moving to the Midlands would seek jobs in the clerical field, while about 20 percent would want professional and managerial jobs, the study projected.

The study calculated that 28,405 jobs would be created in the area between 2002 and 2008 in seven top categories: retail; health; food services; food products; professional, scientific and technical; Internet and data processing; and education. While there should be plenty of work, the study recommended that the board collaborate with the bases' employment offices and offer classes and workshops to help spouses find jobs. "That makes tremendous sense," Austin said. "We definitely have information and services that can be provided."