

Sites to behold

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Experts say Fort Carson's construction surge is like nothing they've ever seen

By TOM ROEDER THE GAZETTE

A building boom under way at Fort Carson is the post's biggest and most expensive ever, post officials say.

And the \$155 million price tag so far to prepare for 10,000 additional soldiers is only a down payment covering projects already begun or due to start soon.

"This is an exciting time," said Edward Whitcraft, the post's deputy director of public works.

Whitcraft, who has followed construction work at Fort Carson for 30 years, said he's never seen anything like the current effort.

The Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce couldn't be happier.

"Obviously, it's good news for the local economy, and the next couple of years will have more good news," said Jeff Crank, the chamber's senior vice president for governmental affairs. "I see a billion bucks being spent there in the next couple of years. I don't think Colorado Springs has ever seen anything like this."

The building rush is driven by massive growth slated for Fort Carson. At the start of 2005, it had about 15,000 soldiers, including units deployed to war. By 2008, the post is expected to be home to 25,000 soldiers.

The Army said in June that Fort Carson would be home to 22,000 soldiers under the command of the 4th Infantry Division and 3,000 soldiers in other units.

More than \$110 million of the construction money is going to build housing for those additional soldiers. The biggest project, costing \$74 million, involves gutting and renovating 14 Vietnam-era barracks buildings to bring them up to the Army's living standard for single soldiers.

In the rebuilt barracks, soldiers will have private bedrooms and will share a bathroom and a kitchenette with a roommate. Before, soldiers were stacked four to a room and shared locker room-style bathrooms and showers.

Whitcraft said the increased privacy and comparative luxury of the redesigned barracks should help the Army keep its soldiers.

"It just makes the life of the soldier a whole lot easier," he said.

Other construction cash is going to office buildings and training areas. The biggest of those projects is a \$28 million training range that will allow commanders to electronically record the performance of their troops.

Whitcraft said planners also are drawing up proposals for buildings to house an additional brigade that would arrive in 2007 with the 4th Infantry Division.

The 4th Infantry Division also would need its own headquarters building. The 7th Infantry Division, which oversees the training of National Guard and reserve troops, occupies the post's current headquarters.

Other planned work would upgrade roads and utilities serving the post.

The building boom won't be limited to Fort Carson. Planners envision roadwork to handle an increase in commuters to the post and an increase in off-base homebuilding, especially in Fountain, just east of the post.

There is a note of financial caution coming from some corners, though, said John Pike, executive director of the Virginia-based defense think tank GlobalSecurity.org.

Pike said the government is stretched thin by wartime obligations coupled with recent Gulf Coast hurricanes.

"There's some budgetary risk," he said.

But, Pike said, if the government is sending the troops to Fort Carson, it'll

eventually have to come up with cash for construction.

"They can't just leave those soldiers standing around in the parking lot," he said.

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FOLLOW THE MONEY

Barracks:

\$114 million, including \$74 million to renovate 14 1970s-era barracks. Three other barracks projects under way.

Training ranges:

\$28 million training range area. Next year, work should start on a \$30 million urban combat-training range.

Air terminal:

\$10 million in improvements to Peterson Air Force Base that will help speed Fort Carson soldiers to battle.



Fort Carson is renovating barracks by gutting 14 buildings and modernizing them for occupation by hundreds of incoming soldiers who will be calling the post home. The renovations are expected to save the Army millions of dollars and to benefit the area economy.



PHOTOS BY BRYAN OLLER, THE GAZETTE - Aside from paying to house an influx of soldiers, Fort Carson construction cash is going to office buildings and training areas. The biggest of those projects is a \$28 million training range that will allow commanders to electronically record the performance of their soldiers.



BRYAN OLLER, THE GAZETTE - Fort Carson is renovating barracks by gutting 14 buildings and modernizing them for incoming soldiers. The renovation is expected to save the Army millions of dollars. New furniture is being moved into some of the rooms.