Never say "Never Moving to MD"

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A version of this article appeared in the 23 October 2009 *Monmouth Message*

You might wonder what the CECOM LCMC Historical Office could possibly tell you about early relocation. That's the G1's lane, right?

Usually, yes. But the Historical Office's most recent round of BRAC related oral histories kicked off with some good advice for early movers.

The U.S. Army has a long tradition of using oral history to preserve historical information and to enrich its official written histories. As explained in Army Regulation (AR) 870-5, Military History: Responsibilities, Policies, and Procedures, oral history activities "are conducted to obtain historical information that may not otherwise be recorded."

The Historical Office conducts oral histories on a wide variety of topics, but focuses this month on BRAC.

Efforts to record BRAC experiences began with former CG and PEO C3T MG Michael R. Mazzucchi in September 2005 and have continued periodically throughout the four years since.

Now, the Historical Office plans interviews with some fourteen key BRAC players from throughout the CECOM LCMC (both at Fort Monmouth and at APG) and the Fort Monmouth Garrison. CECOM LCMC staff historian forward Floyd Hertweck also plans to conduct interviews with some early movers from the general population from his pod at Eagle Point at some point in the near future.

How does the oral history program work?

The interviewer researches questions relevant to the given interview. Interviewees can see these questions in advance. The interview is not limited to this list, however, and interviewees are encouraged to volunteer as much additional information as they would like.

The interview takes place in person or via phone. The interviewer records it.

The Historical Office staff generates transcripts of these oral history interviews. Interviewees can review and approve them. Original recordings and copies of the approved transcripts stay in the CECOM LCMC historical archives, where they are used to augment publications like the Annual Command History. Transcripts are also sent to Center of Military History, the U.S. Army Military History Institute, the Center for Army Lessons Learned, and AMC HQ.

These BRAC interviews will likely be used in the BRAC After Action Report as well, according to Deputy Commander for Operations, Plans, and BRAC COL Kent Woods. Woods himself has been interviewed in the past and is on the list of interviewees for this round of oral histories.

Interviewees sign an oral history access agreement saying that the interview is Army property. The first to sign on the dotted line this go-round was Mr. Dominic D'Orazio, CECOM LCMC Director of Internal Review. D'Orazio spent the summer at APG as one of the first Directors forward.

But it wasn't long ago that D'Orazio swore he would never move to Maryland. He shared on 2 September 2009,

"Before BRAC became law, I was at a DA Internal Review Symposium in Scottsdale, AZ in the summer of 2005. We were in a separate ceremony attended by all AMC personnel. LTG Hack, the AMC Deputy Commanding General at the time, was presenting me with the AMC IR Auditor of the Year Award. After being presented with and accepting the award, I blurted out (I don't know what possessed me) that 'I was never moving to Maryland.' LTG Hack commented that he wasn't touching that remark."

But a true love of his job and the uncertain economy changed D'Orazio's mind. His position as temporary director of the Internal Review Office was to end 31 March 2008 and the Commanding General wanted to hire a permanent director located at APG. D'Orazio decided to apply.

As he explained, "I loved my job as the 'temporary' director, as well as my entire 26 years within the Internal Review Office. The housing prices were going down, the economy was going down, and 33 years of government service under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) was not going to be enough to retire on, so I needed to work some more years after the Fort closed."

D'Orazio and his wife visited a former co-worker in Maryland in August 2008. The couple returned home, did some more research, and decided to look for houses in Cecil County because they felt they could get more house and property for their money there.

D'Orazio learned that he had been selected as the permanent Director of Internal Review on 1 October 2008. He and his wife visited Maryland twice with a real estate agent and started looking at houses, but their hands were tied until D'Orazio received his PCS orders on 17 January 2009.

The couple ultimately decided to sell their house through the Department of Defense National Relocation Program (DNRP). D'Orazio recalled, "I wanted to get everything (selling the townhouse in NJ, buying a new house in MD, relocating to MD) out of the way so that I could concentrate on my work entirely and then start working on bringing other staff employees to APG. My wife and I decided we would sell our house through the DNRP."

D'Orazio found selling his home relatively painless, although when asked, "Did the downturn in the housing market affect your sale," he replied, "Emphatically yes."

He continued, "One of the downsides to the process was that one of my neighbors had to sell her house for less than she was asking for because her house needed a lot of work, and her house sold before I could get my house on the market. So I knew at that point I was fighting an uphill battle to get more for my house. Once I entered DNRP, everything was quick. The appraisers were selected and came to the house to appraise the house. The inspector came and did a complete inspection of the house. He found about six items that needed to be repaired or replaced. All were replaced. The two real estate agents that I had selected came and visited. I asked my wife which agent she liked. Our agent selection was unanimous as we felt the agent was well-prepared and had her act in order for the house to be sold quickly. It did. It took two plus weeks to find a bona-fide buyer. The buyer had her own inspector to inspect the house. He found another six items (which were not identified by the previous inspector) that needed to be repaired or replaced. We repaired/replaced all items…. In the end, I found a buyer who offered me the same amount I was offered from my relocation contractor. Since we found a buyer, we are entitled to the Home Marketing Incentive Program."

Shipping his household goods went well, too. D'Orazio even tipped the movers "for the great job and great care they took on our household items…Since we have moved in and unpacked most of the boxes, we found only a few small items broken, nothing…we couldn't do without."

D'Orazio cautions people not to wait until the last minute to out process at Fort Monmouth. He thought the process went "smooth, although it's always tense because you are trying to out-process, contact those activities in person, and make your way to all of them."

APG welcomed D'Orazio with a newcomer's orientation. He asked for and received a sponsor, saying, "The APG Forward team tries to match the employee relocating with a sponsor with similar family characteristics. My sponsor did provide me with a package of pamphlets and was available for any questions that I had."

D'Orazio has since trained to be a sponsor himself because he is anxious to be of assistance to as many fellow C4ISR employees as he can. He "sent out e-mails to people I know and who are relocating that I am a sponsor and they could ask for me once they get ready for the move. I have reached out to other folks who are preparing to enter the DNRP program and given them my thoughts about the entire house selling process."

Looking for some cold, hard stats? D'Orazio can share some of those, too. He says his house in the town of North East, MD "is 2,700 square feet with another 1,700 sq ft basement. It sits on 1.3 acres with half of the lot being protected woodlands. My real estate taxes are roughly $3,300. I owned a townhouse in NJ which meant that my backyard consisted of 12 feet beyond the back of the house and I was paying almost $5,000 in real estate taxes."

He finds the cost of living in his new community "Definitely cheaper than living in NJ," and says "No matter where my wife and I have shopped, we have noticed a lot of the prices much cheaper than in NJ."

One area in which MD costs more than NJ? The Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA). D'Orazio urges movers to research how much it will cost them to switch over their driver's license and car registration and insurance. His MVA trips cost him over $600!

The newly minted MD resident (he'll show you the driver's license to prove it!) started work at the Gunpowder Club, Building E4650, in the Edgewood Area of APG also known as APG-South. He later moved to Eagle Point, an office trailer park in Edgewood which he calls "Pod City." But don't be scared, D'Orazio swears "It basically has all of the comforts of my regular office at Fort Monmouth minus my own larger office. The desks and partitions are used but clean and like new. The only drawback is that you have to tune out all of the work being done by your co-workers."

While Edgewood looks a bit outdated to D'Orazio, he said he has "driven through APG North and since there is a lot of construction, it's going to be a beautiful post, much like Fort Monmouth is now."

D'Orazio ended his interview with some recommendations for those who will be relocating in the coming months and years:

"Come down and visit the area on nights and weekends. Talk to your co-workers who have relocated. Get an idea of areas that you might consider. Go…and find listings of houses ... for sale and track them. Since we are in a down market, I was able to realize and see the housing prices dropping."

"Maryland is not bad once you get acclimated to it. It does have a lot to offer. As mentioned in the beginning I was very reluctant in moving to MD. Everyone has to really concentrate and decide what is best for their families."

More BRAC information is available at

https://www.kc.us.army.mil/BRAC/home.html

and

https://www2.monmouth.army.mil/usagfmima/sites/local/brac.asp