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ARMY CENTER BECOMES FIRST TENANT AT FORT SAM -

The U.S. Army Medical Information Technology Center (USAMITC) will soon be making its home at Fort Sam Houston. Formerly known as the U.S. Army Medical Information Systems and Services Agency, USAMITC will occupy 75,000 square feet at the North Beach Pavilion, one of three buildings that is being rehabbed for the project called the Offices at Fort Sam.

The organization, which had previously leased space in the Greenway Park Office Building on the Northeast Side, will move a total of 375 employees to Fort Sam. The group will officially move in on Feb. 6 -- an event that will entail much fanfare, including a keynote address by Lt. Gen. James B. Peake, Surgeon General of the Army and the commander of the U.S. Army Medical Department (AMEDD). The ribbon-cutting will be hosted by Fort Sam Houston, along with locally based Orion Partners Inc. and Pennsylvania-based Weston Solutions Inc. -- the development partners behind the multimillion-dollar Offices at Fort Sam project.

In all, the project involves the redevelopment of the old Brooke Army Medical Center ("Old BAMC"), a 225,000-square-foot facility; and the North and South Beach Pavilions, each totaling 121,000 square feet. Leasing of the Fort Sam buildings is being handled by locally based Cross & Company. Work continues USAMITC is the first of three previously announced tenants to move into the Offices at Fort Sam. In all, a total of 240,000 square feet -- out of the 467,000 square feet of space comprising the project -- has now been leased. Future tenants include U.S. Army South and the Southeast Regional Office of the U.S. Army Installation Management Agency, which will occupy 114,000 and 51,000 square feet, respectively, in the Old BAMC. The redevelopment of BAMC is scheduled to be finished in late April, says Tom Chandler, president of Orion Partners, which serves as the general partner of the project.

The Offices at Fort Sam project has required that the development partners respect the historical nature of the buildings while also bringing the facilities up to date on other features. For example, the North Beach Pavilion's exterior was restored to its original 1931 appearance -- as dictated by federal and state historical guidelines. Meanwhile, the interior was gutted to make room for modern features such as state-of-the-art mechanical, electrical, plumbing, life safety, elevator and communications systems. Chandler, who recently visited the site, says the quality of the work on the first two buildings is almost beyond expression. "I mean, what a beautiful office space has been created from some old army barracks and a hospital," he says.

"Real estate is not usually an emotional business," Chandler continues. "But this project has been pretty emotional. (Those involved in the project) have poured a lot of their companies and their lives into this. This will be the pinnacle of our careers."