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FORT MEADE: A HOUSING PRIVATIZATION PARTNERSHIP AT WORK

A unique, cooperative initiative is laying plans for developing and managing housing at Fort Meade for the next 50 years.

**BY CHUCK DEBELIUS,
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There is a vinyl-sided building at Fort George G. Meade, Md., not far from the flag pole. Its distinctive architecture—simple, wood-framed, boxy structure with a sloping shingled roof, devoid of frills—marks it as a World War II relic. Refurbished now, it is freshly painted, carpeted, air-conditioned, and poised to support yet another offensive in Fort Meade's proud history of support to troops mobilizing for far-off battles. This time, though, the battle is on the home front. The enemy is composed of battalions of obsolescent houses trapped in the time warp of tiny bedrooms, "one bathroom is enough regardless of family size," and unfunded maintenance backlog. Victory for this battle will be won when Fort Meade's military families are able to move into real homes and enjoy a sense of community that comes along with the sort of amenities that modern real estate developments routinely provide.

In keeping with military tradition, our revitalized building carries its own distinctive acronym. Residential Communities Initiative (RCI) is proclaimed on the sign that is mounted outside. This is where the battle plans are being drawn for the latest campaign. The war room within is populated with architects and engineers and land planners. D-Day is Feb. 2, 2002, when a full-scale assault will be mounted. This is the story of a new way of doing business that will be conducted in the best interests of military families.

Privatizing Military Housing

Until some landmark legislation was passed in 1996, military family housing virtually everywhere was subject to the triple whammy of deterioration, funding shortfalls, and anachronistic features that are inadequate for the needs of a 21st century volunteer force. Privatization quickly became a new buzzword. For the first time in decades, the basic allowance

for housing (BAH) would actually be used to build and maintain military family housing.

In 1999, the U.S. Army revised its approach to the privatization of military family housing. The Army switched from a Request for Proposal (RFP) process requiring detailed specific proposals to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process, a much more innovative approach, which seeks out the most qualified developer. The most qualified developer collaborates with the installation RCI office to develop a Community Development and Management Plan (CDMP), the blueprint for the community. Fort Meade is the third installation selected as a pilot site for the RFQ approach.

On Mar. 6, 2001, MC Partners, LLC, was selected as the most qualified developer for the Fort Meade family housing privatization. Through this privatization effort, MC Partners will manage all family homes at Fort Meade for the next 50 years, and they will construct, maintain, and repair over 3,000 homes during a 10-year construction period.

MC Partners, a partnership between Picerne Real Estate Group and The IT Group, was formed for the express purpose of joining forces with the U.S. Army to improve the quality of life for Fort Meade residents through improved housing designs, neighborhood layouts, and professional property management. MC Partners combines the strengths of Picerne, a premier property owner, manager, and developer, with The IT Group, a world-class construction, engineering, and facilities management company and a Top 25 Department of Defense (DoD) contractor.

Forming a Partnership

Within a very short period of time, MC Partners and the Fort Meade RCI Team formed a true Army-Developer partnership. This partnership is called Meade Communities.



Above: Proposed communities at Fort Meade will be structured around "neighborhood greens" to promote community identity.

Left: MC Partners and the RCI team collaborate on the master plan design.

On May 7, 2001 this partnership was formalized at the Partnership Signing Ceremony held at Mills Court in the Argonne Hills residential area of Fort Meade. Col. Michael J. Stewart, Installation Commander of Fort Meade; Maj. Gen. James T. Jackson, Commanding General of U.S. Army Military District of Washington; Dr. Joseph W. Westphal, Acting Secretary of the Army; Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes of Maryland; Congressman Benjamin L. Cardin of Maryland's third district; Tony DeLuca, chief executive officer of The IT Group and senior executive advisor of MC Part-

ners; John G. Picerne, executive vice president of Picerne Real Estate Group and board member of MC Partners; and Janie Warner, military spouse and resident of Fort Meade, each spoke at this ceremonial event.

Acting Secretary Westphal honored former Assistant Secretary of the Army Mahlon (Sandy) Appgar IV, who was in the audience, for his foresight, dedication, and tireless efforts to facilitate the RCI Program. "His vision was to go beyond tearing down those buildings and rebuilding new ones. His vision was to establish a community around

Right: Obsolescent homes at Fort Meade will be demolished. New homes will be built, emphasizing green space and a sense of community.



Left: The RCI office at Fort Meade is a refurbished World War II relic.



housing units and military installations all over the country, and, I hope, the world."

In her remarks, Janie Warner, the resident spokesperson and member of the Fort Meade RCI Advisory Committee explained that RCI "has opened doors for creativity, expertise, capital, and knowledge from the community developers."

Signing the declaration were Acting Secretary Westphal, General Jackson, Colonel Stewart, Mr. DeLuca, and Mr. Picerne. The formal declaration states that the Department of the Army and MC Partners agree to join together as partners to improve the Army's residential community at Fort Meade. Together they will:

- Revolutionize the quality of life for families serving to protect the American dream through partnership and empowerment;
- Provide all military families at Fort Meade with access to quality family

housing that is safe, affordable, attractive, convenient, and well maintained;

- Ensure the residents of Fort Meade benefit from consistent, exemplary property management and family support services;
- Improve the appearance and functions of the Fort Meade residential community while protecting natural resources and meeting environmental stewardship responsibilities;
- Exist as a unified team in purpose, process, and communication throughout the duration of our partnership at Fort Meade; and
- Protect the interests of the residents, guaranteeing their voices are always heard.

Making Long-Term Plans

Currently, Meade Communities is working diligently to complete their CDMP by July 1, 2001. The CDMP is a document that will provide a blueprint for the development and long-term

property management of Fort Meade for 50 years. Meade Communities believes their CDMP will quickly become the hallmark for privatized military family housing. Once their CDMP is completed, it will be delivered first to the Army and a month later to Congress for approval. MC Partners' goal is to obtain approval and become fully operational by February 2002.

In order to accomplish this goal under this aggressive time schedule, MC Partners and the Fort Meade RCI team share a building dedicated entirely to the privatization program. They collaborate daily to find the best solutions to a myriad of issues. Together, they coordinate with a host of stakeholders, including the enlisted personnel and officers and their spouses who provide input for the home designs, neighborhoods, and a community that will significantly enhance the quality of life for military families at Fort Meade for the next 50 years.

Within the first 10 years of the planned 50-year program, Meade Communities will build more than 2,800 new homes, demolish 2,500 obsolescent homes, maintain and repair 262 homes that have been built since 1995, and care for another 112 brick homes that are considered historic property. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because this pilot program is large and without precedent. It is an opportunity because Meade Communities is in a position to improve the quality of life for America's best while they establish a benchmark against which other privatization efforts may measure their own success.

Meade Communities will create neighborhoods that, by virtue of their character and content, will become the overall community of choice for military families in the Military District of Washington (MDW) area. This community will offer social and service centers in support of the families and

their interests. In close coordination with and under the approval of Army authorities, Meade Communities will develop services that offer recreation and relaxation for enjoyment and rejuvenation. The community will provide a place to live, work, and play in an environment that is reflective and supportive of the values of military families. Meade Communities will implement design enhancements that promote a zone of "ownership" and feelings of responsibility for the family, the neighborhood, and the community.

Meade Communities plans to build neighborhood centers and provide an unprecedented amenity package within walking distance to most housing. Swimming pools, tot lots, indoor and outdoor athletic facilities, fitness rooms, play rooms, jogging paths and bike paths, meeting rooms and media

Their proposed neighborhoods will provide high-quality homes and amenities for America's best families over the life of this unique and creative initiative.

rooms will be available to all. Each neighborhood will have its own property manager and a property management team consisting of family services and maintenance support that is devoted exclusively to that neighborhood. In addition, Neigh-

borhood Centers will have extended hours to meet the needs of the military families.

It is evident that MC Partners is working in partnership with the Army leadership, the Army's RCI program and Fort George G. Meade. Together, as Meade Communities, they will focus on the military members and their families to enhance quality of life and family well-being. Their proposed neighborhoods will provide high-quality homes and amenities for America's best families over the life of this unique and creative initiative. ■

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