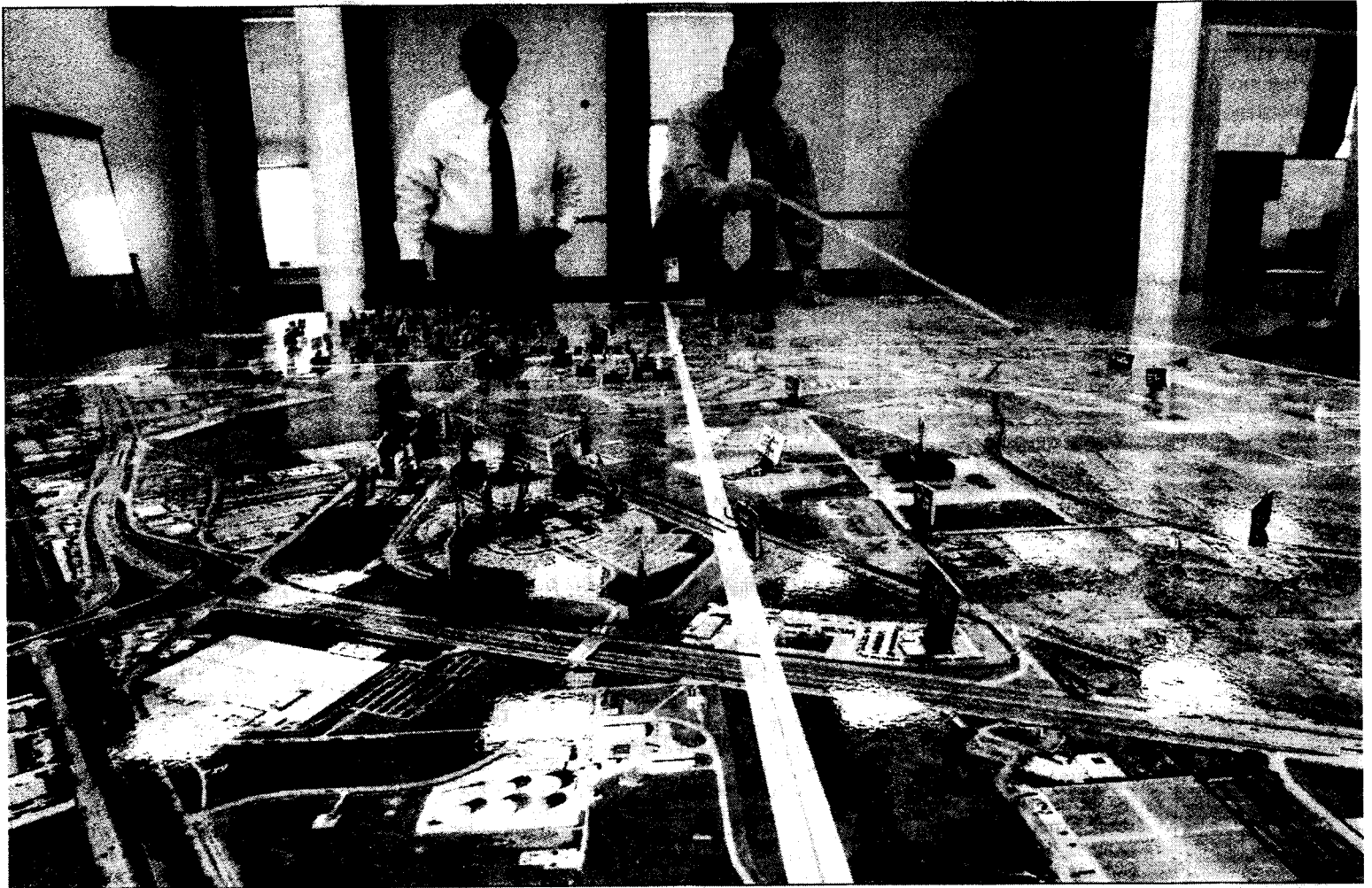


S.A.'s Army post soon will embark on major construction projects to make room for more than 10,000 personnel. The much-celebrated projects will have a downside though: Traffic snarls and plenty of noise

Fort Sam's building boon



GLORIA FERNIZ

John Bann (left) and Michael Hartman, who are central figures in the transformation of Fort Sam Houston, discuss the construction projects.

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about to begin.

Starting this month, Fort Sam will be hit by a construction wave the likes of which hasn't been seen since the Depression, thanks to the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

BRAC, as it's called, ordered 23 installations to shutter by 2011 and

issued 2,513 closure recommendations, most of them mission realignments, but the news for San Antonio was mostly good. The fifth base closure round since 1988 is going to bring \$1.56 billion in construction to Fort Sam alone.

In all, the closure round will pump about \$2.1 billion into the post and a pair of Air Force bases. But nowhere will it be more pronounced than at Fort Sam, which will add 10,567 military, civilian and student personnel in the next three years.

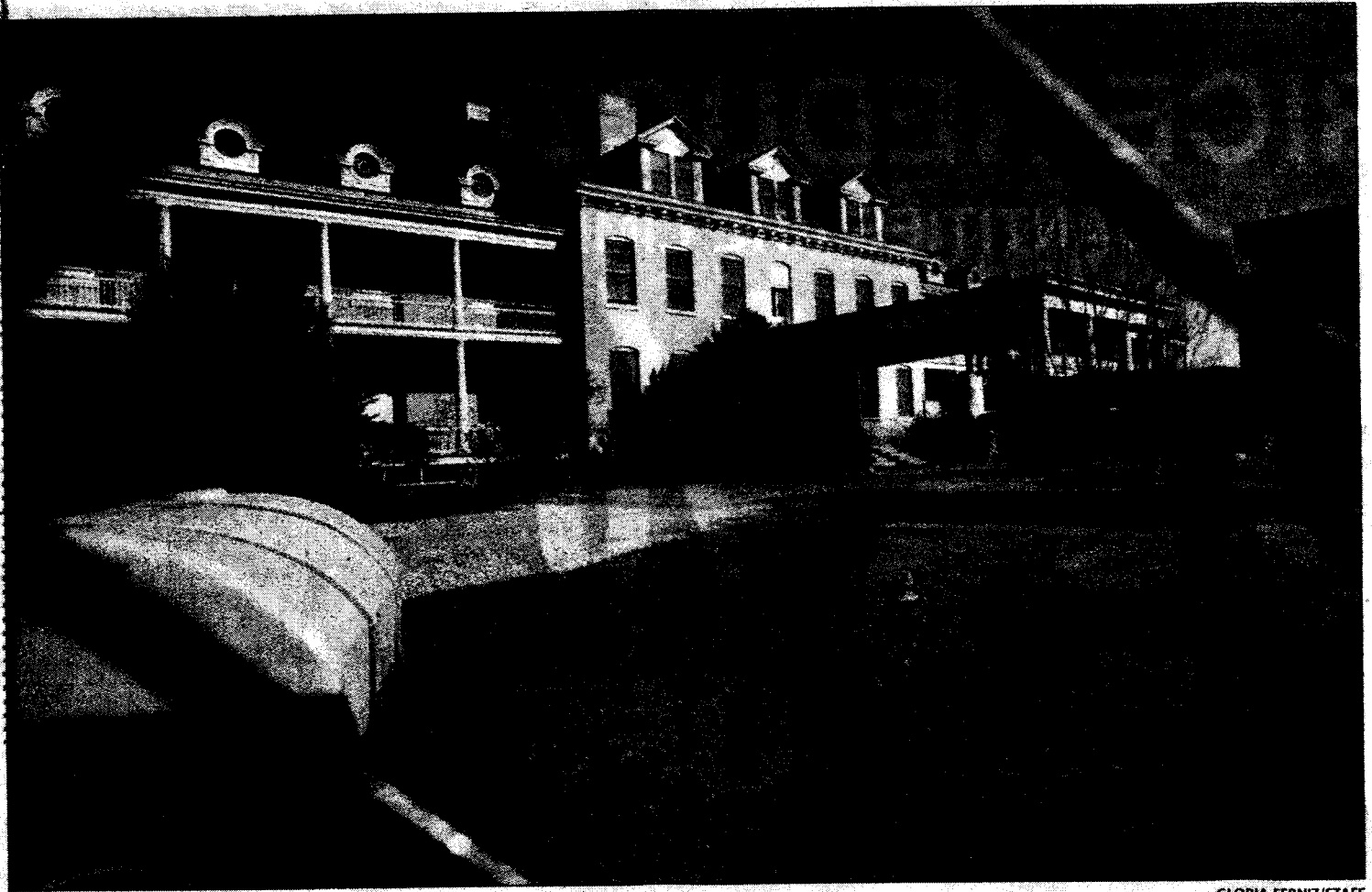
The work already under way is an expansion of the troop clinic renovation on the 1908 Station pitail — isn't part of Fort Sam's massive BRAC buildup, the bulk of which will come in 2010 when workers arrive at the post.

The long-awaited benefits of the closure round will begin in earnest once ground is broken on the first BRAC project, the \$92 million Battlefield Health and Trauma Center. That will occur in a ceremony

See **IMPACT/6A**

The roar of heavy trucks throbs like a bass line beneath the whining of hydraulic tools and the banging of hammers outside the McWethy Troop Medical Clinic at Fort Sam Houston. But the sound it produces is discordant — like an orchestra tuning up before a concert.

The metaphor is apt because the projects currently under way only are warmups for the work that's



GLORIA FERNIZ/STAFF

A \$25 million project will convert this building at Fort Sam Houston to house the Installation Management Command West Regional. In all, 23 projects are planned on the post under the 2005 BRAC order. Another 32 buildings not tied to BRAC will be built or renovated.

Impact of construction boom will be felt on and off Fort Sam

CONTINUED FROM 1A

at 2 p.m. next Friday on Fort Sam's Parking Lot A, which has 273 spaces behind the Center for the Intrepid and two Fisher Houses.

Work will start within 90 days on a parking garage, two dorms, a dining facility and an instructional building.

In all, 23 projects are planned under the closure order, 19 of them new buildings with four others to be renovated on the old post, established in 1876. Another 32 buildings not tied to BRAC will be built or renovated.

The work will range from dorms and dining facilities to gyms and youth centers needed to accommodate the doubling of Fort Sam's daily student population as directed by BRAC from 4,500 today to 9,000 in 2011.

"There's going to be a tremendous amount of construction traffic," post spokesman Phil Reidinger said, "just because of the volume of construction and the types of buildings we are constructing, the compressed time frame for construction and the numbers of buildings."

Local leaders are celebrating Fort Sam's growth, but Reidinger warned it will bring headaches — particularly traffic snarls, lost parking and plenty of noise. The work will require a conductor to ensure that projects start and end on cue.

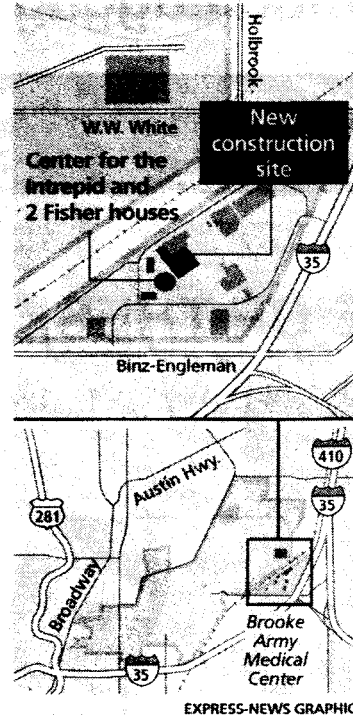
That job has fallen to Michael Hartman, who coordinates all BRAC actions planned for the post. He tracks every project, using dozens of color-coded flags on a large map in his office.

Juggling those projects will be tough enough when weather, always an unpredictable factor, is taken into consideration. Another logistical hurdle to overcome will be a divided Capitol Hill, which routinely squabbles over the budget past the start of the federal fiscal year in October.

"We build in a buffer and plan

Fort Sam construction

A groundbreaking next Friday on the \$92 million Battlefield Health and Trauma Center will kick off more than \$1.5 billion in BRAC-related construction and renovation at Fort Sam Houston.



the projects to start generally in the second quarter, anticipating the length of time that it takes by the time the budget is approved and the money actually flows to the recipient, which would be us," he explained.

People on and off post will feel the impact of Fort Sam's construction boom this spring, but commanders hope to mitigate the worst aspects of its impact. They'll limit contractors and workers to specific routes on the post.

They've told companies to deliver construction materials in the wee hours of the day to prevent congestion on Interstates 10 and 35, U.S. 281 and Harry Wurz-

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PHIL REIDINGER

Fort Sam Houston spokesman

bach Road. Construction will run from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Weekend work is likely.

The BRAC commission made the post home for armed forces enlisted medical training. It will be done on the new Medical Education Training Campus, to include the Army Medical Department Center and School, already the Defense Department's largest medical training facility.

But the closure round actually accounts for less than half of all the work. A \$300 million La Cateria-like shopping center on the drawing board will headline what's perhaps the most ambitious project unrelated to BRAC. But there's also a PX complex makeover that could top \$100 million and a new \$20 million, 695-room privately run hotel.

The shopping center still is in the design stage, but Reidinger thinks construction could begin in about three years. Well before then, the Army this fall will launch a \$251 million expansion of BAMC's existing emergency room and trauma complex.

BAMC's new six-story ER wing likely will include a rooftop helipad. The bigger ER will replace the Level 1 trauma center that has operated at Wilford Hall Medical Center on the city's South Side as the Air Force hospital is turned into a series of outpatient clinics.

Though not yet approved, the helipad is expected to win support from the Pentagon. Copters now land at a helipad in a small field across from BAMC, requiring an ambulance to transport

patients to the hospital's ER.

"It's clearly designed to shorten the response time and minimize the number of times that patients are transported," Hartman said of the new helipad.

Amid this growth spurt on a post some a few years ago feared could wind up as a BRAC target, Fort Sam has one major concern. Does it have the stormwater and wastewater capacity of a post that will be home to nearly 36,000 military and civilian workers a day, up from 25,000?

Neither power nor water is an infrastructure concern. The post privatized its power system several years ago, and CPS has made upgrades since. Fort Sam also provides its own well water.

But three studies, all to start this year, will reveal if more water, sewer and drainage lines are needed for the expansion. It isn't clear how the Army will pay for improvements if they're needed. BRAC funding typically isn't used to pay for infrastructure improvements, Reidinger said, adding that the post might ask the city to participate in planning for any improvements.

"Where there's a mutual benefit to the city of San Antonio and the local community, we're certainly going to ask the city to help us," he said, adding the Army will find some way to pay for infrastructure work on the 3,000-acre post and won't ask the city to chip in. "That's called working together to improve the local infrastructure."

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