



Event showcases opportunities to partner with Letterkenny Army Depot

By JIM HOOK Senior writer

The fourth annual Letterkenny Business Opportunity Showcase will encourage local businesses to connect with the Army and major defense contractors.

The showcase has grown to focus on "how can we attract new business to the area, not just Letterkenny," according to Letterkenny Chief of Staff Mark Sheffield.

Business development managers from a variety of companies will learn what it takes to partner with Letterkenny, a four-time Shingo medal winner. They also will exchange business cards.

"We are trying to build relationships," Sheffield said. "The idea is to get some of the local contractors, as subs, to work with the Lockheeds and Raytheons."

More than 180 people are expected to attend the showcase that will be Wednesday evening and Thursday morning at The Orchards, Chambersburg.

Vehicles and equipment that Letterkenny repairs will be displayed in the parking lot. There will be

18 exhibits inside.

Brig. Gen. Bennet S. Sacolick, who's commanded Special Operations Forces at many levels, is the keynote speaker Wednesday. Sacolick is the deputy commander of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, N.C. He's served with the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center and was a task force commander of Special Operations during Iraqi Freedom.

Letterkenny has a close association with local business. Its shops are located in and around the Cumberland Valley Business Park. The business park was created on 3,000 acres the depot returned to the community under orders from the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Letterkenny's fortunes have turned around since 1995, and the depot has reclaimed some of the land for expansion.

Letterkenny, its tenant agencies and contractors currently employ 3,700 people. The depot is adding about 20 new government employees every month, according to Sheffield.

The local unemployment rate in March was 8.1 percent, double from a year earlier and the highest rate in 25 years.

"Without Letterkenny, the picture would be much more severe than it is," said L. Michael Ross, president of the Franklin County Area Development Corp. "Letterkenny has been a godsend to us over the last nine months."

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Ross chairs Team Letterkenny, a citizens' group advocating for Letterkenny.

The depot has built on the local work ethic and metal manufacturing base. Letterkenny repairs Patriot missile systems, Humvees, portable generators and other vehicles. Computer and ammunition storage operations are also housed there.

Letterkenny wants 20 percent of its new work to come from partnerships with private industry, Sheffield said.

"There's really a vision about making Letterkenny stronger and its military worth greater," said David G. Sciamanna, president of the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce. "We want to make Letterkenny too valuable to be on the (next BRAC) list."

"It's important for local business to understand what it takes to do business with Letterkenny," he said.

The Letterkenny showcase was modeled after the Johnstown Showcase for Commerce where the main draw is U.S. Rep. Bob Murtha, D-Johnstown, chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

Business development is the emphasis of the Letterkenny Showcase, according to Sheffield. The showcase presents a perfect opportunity for business exposure or networking.

Letterkenny's partnering with major Defense

contractors and the traffic signal at U.S. 11 and Pa. 433 have grown out of the showcase, according to Sheffield and Ross.

The state has allocated funds for a showcase this year and next, but as yet none in future years, Sheffield said.

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