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Franklin County business, development officials look to Oshkosh to aid Letterkenny Army Depot

By JIM HOOK Senior writer

Community leaders flew to Wisconsin last week to support a potential partnership between Letterkenny Army Depot and Oshkosh Defense.

Both produce mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles for the military.

"Hopefully, Oshkosh and Letterkenny will be partnering on a new Humvee line," Franklin County Commissioner Bob Ziobrowski said. "It could have a positive effect on Letterkenny."

Ziobrowski, Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce President David Sciamanna and Michael Ross and David Mackey from the Franklin County Area Development Corp. flew to Oshkosh and back on May 13.

Reuters reported on Monday that Oshkosh is among several companies competing for potential military contracts to upgrade the military's workhorse vehicle. Virginia-based defense analyst Jim McAleese said Oshkosh, Textron Inc., AM General, BAE Systems and some smaller companies specializing in servicing of trucks, are likely to compete.

The Army's 2011 budget plan, beginning Oct. 1, included no funds for new Humvees, but added nearly \$1 billion to a recapitalization program to improve the reliability of 9,270 vehicles returning from Iraq. Also, \$565 million originally earmarked for new trucks is to be funneled into upgrading trucks returning from Iraq.

Reuters also reported that the Army has not made any formal decisions on how to structure a Humvee upgrade program, but is working on a request for proposals, said spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jimmie Cummings. Both the Army and

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Marines are looking a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle program that would eventually replace the 25-year-old Humvee program.

In April, Letterkenny laid off 133 contract employees working on its Humvee line. The Humvees were repaired and fitted with armor. The project, originally expected to last one year, continued for five. The remaining 80 workers are to lose their jobs in July when the current contract ends.

Letterkenny won a Shingo Silver Medallion in 2007 for manufacturing excellence on the Humvee line.

Letterkenny partners with York-based BAE Systems to manufacture its MRAPs.

About half the Oshkosh-made MRAPs are produced at its JLG Industries plant in McConnellsburg, Ziobrowski said.

MRAPs with v-shaped hulls and thick armor have proven to be safer than Humvees for soldiers threatened by improvised explosive devices. They are also heavier and more expensive.

Letterkenny Chief of Staff Mark Sheffield said Oshkosh and Letterkenny currently do not share any major workload.

"We have been working on a few proposals with Oshkosh Defense," Sheffield said on Wednesday.

Ziobrowski said the meeting in Oshkosh was very productive. Ross said the meeting "went well."

"We wanted to make clear that as a county we were interested in furthering the partnership," Ross said. "We want to make them aware of the economic resources that might be applicable to that."

Letterkenny Commander Col. Cheri Provancha also was attending an internship at Oshkosh as part of an executive leadership program, Ross said.

Money left from a state BRAC grant awarded to the development corporation three years ago paid for the trip, Ross said.

Jim Hook can be contacted at 262-4759 or jhook@publicopinionnews.com.

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