

# The Washington Times

## VUOTO: A realignment boon in Alabama

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### ON BASE WITH GRACE COLUMN:

Even in an economic downturn, and in an era of projected Obama administration defense budget cuts, some regions are thriving. Huntsville, Ala., home of Redstone Arsenal, is bucking current economic trends and presents hope for more growth and prosperity.

John Southerland, communications director of the Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County, and Elizabeth N. Morard, president and CEO of Qualis Corp., were part of a delegation that came to Washington this spring on an annual visit to promote their city and to ask for continued congressional funding to support the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. BRAC began in 1988 and consists of efforts of the federal government and the armed forces to realign military installations across the nation in order to make the armed forces more efficient and save money. BRAC provisions have been implemented in stages -- 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995 and 2005.

The 1995 BRAC process had an affect on Redstone Arsenal. The Army's Aviation Command and affiliated components were moved from St. Louis to the area, resulting in the relocation of about 1,600 jobs. More than 3,000 military contractor jobs were also moved to the area as a result of the consolidation of the Aviation Command with the Missile Command, according to a recent Tennessee Regional Growth Coordination Plan.

The same report outlines the continued impact on the region following the 2005 BRAC process. Elements being relocated from Alexandria; Arlington; Dothan, Ala.; and Macon, Ga., will bring 4,700 new jobs to the area and an estimated 5,000 contractor jobs. This will result in "significant economic growth in the thirteen counties of the Tennessee Valley region over the next five years," states the report, including a projected BRAC growth of 19,700 jobs and a population increase of 37,000 people. When other factors are calculated, between 2008 and 2011, there will be a combined total increase of 33,000 jobs and 70,000 population.

Mr. Southerland and Mrs. Morard told The Washington Times that they had a simple message to deliver: Huntsville is a model community in the base-integration process and deserves the support and confidence of the American people. They are encouraging Americans to take advantage of the new job opportunities that will emerge in Huntsville within the next few years. They also want to spread the word that supporting Huntsville benefits America by helping to fulfill the national security goals outlined by Congress and the Department of Defense.

Huntsville and the surrounding region has been cited by America's leading news outlets as a model place to live. It tops Kiplinger's Personal Finance 2009 Best Cities ranking. According to a January Yahoo hot jobs survey, Huntsville is among the 10 top cities for salary growth. Forbes cited Madison County in November as the country's best place to live during the economic downturn. A September report in the Wall Street Journal magazine Smart Money named Huntsville as one of America's Top 5 cities for job opportunities. U.S. News & World Report pronounced in September that Huntsville is one of the country's 10 best cities for retirees seeking jobs. Even National Geographic cited Huntsville favorably in Sept. 2007 as one of the country's top adventure towns. Does news emanating from one city get any better than this, even in the best of times?

According to the evidence in these reports, Huntsville is earning the trust of many Americans in shepherding the realignment process. The area is fulfilling America's national security needs while providing job opportunities galore.

• Grace Vuoto is the editor of Base News, a community journalism project of The Washington Times for America's military community.