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SURVEY FROM K-STATE SOCIOLOGISTS TO GAUGE MANHATTAN-AREA RESIDENTS' READINESS FOR POPULATION GAIN

MANHATTAN — Some might say Manhattan and surrounding communities are getting ready for company.

What happens when 30,000 new members enter a community? How do planners, key officials and citizens anticipate and prepare for a sudden and uneven population expansion?

These are some of the issues addressed in a survey a Kansas State University research team will send out to 2,000 Riley County residents beginning March 1, as the area around Fort Riley prepares for the relocation of several military units.

L. Susan Williams, associate professor, and Ryan Spohn, assistant professor, both in the department of sociology, anthropology and social work, are performing the research to assess the readiness and needs of the community. Williams said they hope to promote positive community change while avoiding possible negative consequences.

"For the most part, we believe the community will respond in very positive ways to the community expansion," Williams said. "At the same time, we need to prepare for potential challenges. Change, whether positive or not, always brings challenges."

The survey asks about confidence and trust in the community, school and housing needs, concerns about crime control and sources of news and information about the military. A Web site, developed by the Kansas Population Center at K-State, will publish survey results.

The U.S. Department of Defense, in its 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Plan, recommended that several military units relocate to Fort Riley, including the Army's 1st Infantry Division, three Brigade Combat Teams, and a multifunctional Aviation Brigade. Population estimates of the expansion include more than 12,000 soldiers and 1,500 support staff. Estimates place 2.5 family members per soldier, bringing the population projection to more than 30,000, Williams said.

Spohn and Williams are asking residents who receive a survey in the mail from K-State to fill it out and return promptly in the envelope provided.

(more)

"Full citizen participation is key to successfully completing the study," Spohn said. He stressed the importance of researchers and citizens alike engaging in the development of the community. The K-State team of sociologists will make public their analysis in determining key "hot spots" involved in the rapid population transition and recommendations for positive responses.

The project, called the Fort Riley-K-18 Corridor Campaign, is the first of its kind in the country and establishes groundwork for creating a general model for communities in rapid transition, Williams said. The Kansas Population Center, headed by Laszlo Kulcsar, assistant professor of sociology, joins the research team in its effort to analyze change associated with population shifts and to anticipate its effect on infrastructure, both in terms of human and physical capacity.

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