

Biometric facility moving to downtown Clarksburg

Army inks 3-year lease for Main Street property

by Jim Fisher
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WASHINGTON - Nearly a year after the lease was signed, the Army's Biometrics Fusion Center finally appears ready to move its operation to downtown Clarksburg.

The move from the current Bridgeport location is expected in July, according to a late-afternoon press release from U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd.

A lease for the late Tom Keeley's building at 347 W. Main St. has been in effect since June. The contract is for a three-year lease with two additional one-year options. The annual rent is estimated at \$456,750.

The 29,870-square-foot facility will include a state-of-the-art demonstration center and a testing and evaluation laboratory space.

"I have great hopes for the biometrics industry in North Central West Virginia. The (Biometrics Fusion Center) can serve as the anchor of that fast-growing effort and provide a strong signal to the industry that West Virginia is open for businesses," Byrd said in the release.

A permanent biometrics facility is planned for the FBI complex and is projected to begin in 2006. When complete, the permanent site is expected to house 150-175 employees, infuse between \$18 million and \$20 million into the state's economy annually and open the door for new private-sector investments, officials have said.

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The Army-administered center tests high-end commercial identification software for military applications, such as biometric "smart cards" that could be used to limit access to defense networks and facilities.

Biometrics is the science of using bodily characteristics such as fingerprints or iris patterns for identification purposes.

The FBI fingerprint center is the largest biometrics repository in the world, and West Virginia University is home to a prominent biometrics and forensic identification program.