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Nonprofit center hopes to create 800 new jobs

More than twice the number of jobs originally expected could be created during the next five years by a nonprofit organization formed to replace the high-technology positions that left Monmouth County when Fort Monmouth closed earlier this fall.

About 19 of the so-called "team members" of the New Jersey Technology Solutions Center estimate they could create about 800 new jobs and pump millions of dollars into the local economy by 2017, said John Riganati, the center's co-president.

Overall, those team members estimate they will create about 1,000 jobs in that time period, he said.

The team is working on projects that could result in contracts worth at least \$2 million each — and in some cases quite a bit more than that, Riganati said.

The center was originally projected to create between 200 and 300 new positions when it was launched late last year, following receipt of a \$2.9 million earmark from the Department of Defense and a \$500,000 grant from the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

The center gave 19 entities sub-grants of between \$50,000 and \$150,000, each of which was used to further development of current projects, he said.

The money helped the center's partners "do some work that reduces the conjecture (of a project) or probes a principle, then enables the entity, with its own money, to write a proposal," he said.

The center's future was cast in doubt earlier this year when earmarks were discontinued by Congress. Center representatives said then that other means of funding were always anticipated, and were being actively sought.

Under the terms of the DOD earmark, work on those sub-grant projects was supposed to be completed by February. But only two of the projects have been completed, so the center asked for and received an extension from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the end of July, Riganati said.

Riganati said that all proposals will be

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submitted through the center, and the center will receive a processing fee of between 4 percent and 5 percent from any award given.

The money collected from those processing fees will then be used to fund more projects, he said.

The new jobs expected to be created when projects receive contracts fall in a number of areas, including engineering, software development, management and business development, Riganati said.

The center was seen as a way to mitigate the loss of more than 5,000 high-technology — and high-paying — jobs when Fort Monmouth closed in September and the bulk of its missions transferred to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. The fort's closure was mandated in the federal 2005 Base Realignment and Closure round.

The center's creators hope that it will compete for lucrative contracts in four key areas: command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance — of C4ISR, the key mission of the former Fort Monmouth — renewable and alternative energy; homeland defense and security, and cyber- and electronic-warfare and security.

More than four dozen private companies and educational institutions — such as Brookdale Community College in Lincroft and Monmouth University in West Long Branch — have partnered with the center.

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