

# Construction starts on \$26 million armory

by Barbara Crane  
Tundra Times reporter

FT. RICHARDSON — With the turn of a shovel, work began recently on the construction of a new \$26 million armory complex to house the operations of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Currently the department's activities are spread out in seven buildings at

five locations in Anchorage, Ft. Richardson and Wasilla.

This new complex will bring under one roof the headquarters for the Alaska Army and Air National Guard, the Alaska Division of Emergency Services and the Division of Veterans Affairs.

The armory is designed differently than any other armory in the United States. It will be a long and narrow

two-story building, the length of more than three football fields, and will house 1,300 National Guard members from 15 units.

"We planned on making this armory something special," said Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

"We wanted to build the armory so it supported our job of being prepared

for mobilization. That's why the building is going to be so long, so our units can back their vehicles up to their armory and load them up quickly."

The armory will contain a drill hall, emergency operations center, rifle range and exercise room as well as medical, security, administrative, supply and kitchen areas.

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An Organizational Maintenance Shop with 14 workbays will also be part of the new complex, along with office space to house about 200 personnel of the Office of the Adjutant General.

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Schaeffer thanked Alaska's congressional delegation, Gov. Steve Cowper and his staff, and the Alaska State Legislature for their support in finding the funding for construction.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, also took part in the ground-breaking ceremony.

"This construction project represents almost \$24 million in federal money," Stevens said, "and it will be the largest armory in the nation."



*Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer*

Stevens said it was quite a struggle to get federal money for the complex because of its innovative design and because many people still don't understand why projects cost so much more in Alaska than in the Lower 48.

"I believe it is a tribute to the confidence the National Guard Bureau has in the men and women who serve in the Alaska National Guard that they're willing — at this time of declining military budgets — to commit to the future of Alaska and the Alaska National Guard," Stevens said.

The two-year construction project will be completed by Strand Inc. and Kiewit Construction Co., both of Anchorage.