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Orlando sets sail with 1st section of old Navy base

By Kevin Spear

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

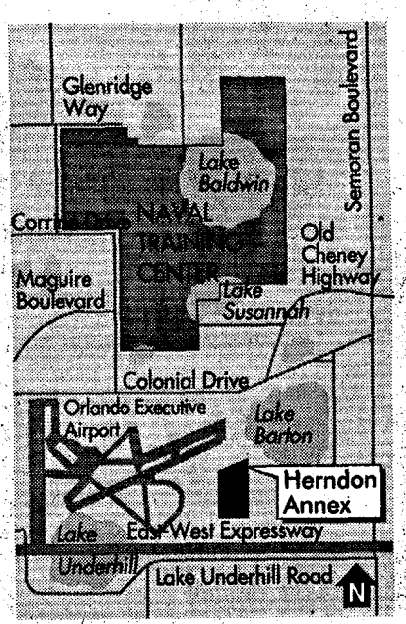
The Navy has handed over its first chunk of the Naval Training Center for civilian use, a move that comes more than three years after federal authorities decided to close the Orlando base.

Navy officials signed a five-year lease Wednesday that gives Orlando possession of the Herndon Annex, a 54-acre tract east of the Orlando Executive Airport.

The Greater Orlando Aviation Authority plans to sublease the tract from the city within the next few weeks.

Both leases are without cost.

City officials ultimately expect to take ownership of the property as a gift under guidelines that allow federal land to be donated when it benefits



SENTINEL GRAPHIC

City expects $250,000 in extra cash

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aviation. That can't happen until federal authorities remedy groundwater contamination found beneath the property.

Yet even as leased property, the Herndon Annex is expected to make money for the authority.

The authority, which administers Orlando's international and executive airports, plans to rent warehouse and other building space.

Authority officials anticipate that rental revenue will pay for property maintenance and bring in as much as $250,000 annually in extra cash.

The closing of the Naval Training Center, part of the nation's downsizing of defense bases, has proved more complex and risky than c officials anticipated.

The NTC's other properties are the 1,133-acre main base north of Colonial Drive, a 46-acre laundry off Maguire Boulevard and the 842-acre McCoy housing annex near the International Airport.

Already about two-thirds of the base has been idle or left vacant by the Navy. But federal regulations, Navy bureaucracy and environmental concerns have bogged down transfer of property to Orlando.

Navy officials are still reviewing the city's purchase offer of $3 million for the main base and housing annex. The laundry property is heavily contaminated with a cleaning solvent.

Transfer of the Herndon Annex has been complicated by the contamination of ground water beneath about one-third of the site. The contaminate is benzene, a petroleum ingredient.

Part of the property was once used as a landfill. Just south of the property, firefighters trained by putting old airplanes into pits, dousing them with fuel and igniting them.

"All of that would contribute to the benzene," said Wayne Hansel, NTC's environmental coordinator.

Much of Herndon Annex was developed by the military in the 1970s. Its buildings include an 80,000-square-foot warehouse, a building used for flight simulator research and a machine shop.

In another NTC matter, U.S. Rep. Bill McCollum, R-Longwood, Thursday criticized federal plans for moving the base's Nuclear Power Training program to Charleston, S.C.

He said a General Accounting Office study found that the Navy will save little by moving the program

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