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## Construction begins for NOAA Pacific Regional Center Main Facility

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Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Hawaii and Walsh Construction recently held a ground breaking ceremony and traditional Hawaiian blessing for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Pacific Regional Center's main facility on Ford Island.

"About six years ago, NOAA entered into a very productive relationship with the Navy in Hawaii to begin developing the new Pacific Regional Center here on historic Ford Island," said Dr. Larry Robinson, assistant secretary of commerce for conservation and management, NOAA. "As the island is undergoing its own revitalization plan, it provided the ideal location for NOAA's new Pacific Regional Headquarters with deep water berthing for vessels, sea water for scientific research, and space that can support over 700 people in the future," he explained.

NAVFAC Pacific awarded the \$131,103,000 firm-fixed price contract to Chicago-based Walsh Construction on Aug. 31, 2010 to repurpose two historic World War II-era aircraft hangars and erect a third structure, building A, that will link them together, creating a single 310,000-square-foot facility. NAVFAC Hawaii will oversee the project, which is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009.

"This is a great day for our Navy," said Vice Adm. Michael Vitale, commander, Navy Installations Command. "There are many historic buildings, structures and archeological sites here in Pearl Harbor, and the stewardship of these significant historic landmarks is part of the Navy's service to our nation ... The NOAA vision for an integrated, consolidated presence in the Pacific is a perfect fit for redeveloping Ford Island," he explained.

Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum (HOK), Inc., a San Francisco based architecture firm renowned for its experience in sustainable design, was hired to produce a plan that blends the facility's historic character with contemporary aspects into a world-class energy efficient building.

Building A will serve as the main public entrance for the center as well as a gateway to a landscaped waterfront park that is part of the complex. A three-story, sky-lit atrium will allow light to diffuse and help ventilate air throughout the building while holding support spaces like an auditorium, fitness center, dining area, and conference rooms.

Sustainable elements such as photovoltaic panels, an innovative sea water air conditioning cooling system, gray and rain water recycling system, and the use of recycled materials are expected to help the facility earn the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold status.

“The standard [for this project] set by the people here 69 years ago [Dec. 7, 1941], is a standard that we can’t achieve, but we will try,” said Dan Walsh, owner and chief executive officer, Walsh Construction.

“And when we bring all our employees [approximately 500 local tradesper-sons] to work right here where they live, we will keep that in mind every day. And we hope when we are done two years from now, that you will be as proud of us from Walsh Construction and our collaborators at HOK as we are of those people 69 years ago ... You have our commitment to make you as proud of us as we are of them,” Walsh said.

The new Pacific Regional Center Main Facility is an American Recovery and Reinvestment project, with the unwavering support of U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye who was able to help create the financing for this project. As a stimulus project, the construction was awarded on the basis of creating and retaining jobs, which in turn will spur economic growth while increasing transparency and awareness of government spending.

“A key partner in this endeavor is the Navy, which opened their island and reshuffled their own priorities to accommodate a sister federal agency,” said Chief of Staff Jennifer Sabas, reading a letter from Hawaii U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye. “Without the Navy, we would not be here today ... and let us not forget that the regional center is a huge construction project, an economic stimulus project that will employ our qualified tradesmen and women, many of whom have been on the bench.”

The project for the new main facility is on a 30-acre campus and will co-locate NOAA’s diverse set of programs that include the National Environmental Satellite and Data Information Services, National Ocean Service, National Weather Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Oceanic and Atmospheric Research Center, Marine and Aviations Operations, the International Tsunami Information Center, Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, and other administrative functions.

More than 700 employees and contractors from various offices on Oahu will be united under one roof, allowing NOAA to reduce costly overhead and improve efficiency.

Several other NOAA facilities, including piers, a storage facility and a ship operations facility are already finished as part of the campus. The Marine Science and Storage Facility is expected to be completed in 2011, while the Pacific Regional Center Main Facility is scheduled to be finished in October 2012.

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