



NEWS

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JMU AND ESSEX CORP. JOIN FORCES TO SUPPORT DEFENSE DEPARTMENT IN DEACTIVATING FOREIGN LAND MINES

HARRISONBURG, Va. — A new partnership between James Madison University, the federal government and Essex Corp. will provide not only a cost-effective humanitarian service to the Department of Defense in its efforts to safely eliminate land mines from war-torn countries, but also new educational opportunities for JMU students, faculty and staff and new high-technology development opportunities for the region.

The Department of Defense has earmarked more than \$1 million to Essex Corp., headquartered in Columbia, Md. JMU will receive funding by Oct. 1 from Essex Corp. to create and maintain a new Center for Humanitarian Demining, which will serve as the organizational umbrella for the project. The project is expected to get under way in the fall semester.

Under the partnership, support systems for the Department of Defense will be coordinated for its ongoing efforts to safely deactivate land mines from areas such as Bosnia, Cambodia and Laos. The Department of Defense, with reinforcement from the White House, is strengthening its programs for training and assisting developing nations as they strive to rid their territory of uncleared land mines, which can have serious detrimental effects to their economic and political viability.

Through the assistance of the demining center at JMU, the Department of Defense will gather information toward its goal of humanitarian demining, which includes mine awareness activities and the location and deactivation of mines, to promote self-sufficiency and economic development in affected countries.

The announcement was made at an outdoor news conference Friday, June 7, by Sen. John

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Warner of Virginia, second most senior Republican on the Armed Services Committee, near JMU's College of Integrated Science and Technology (CISAT), where the center will be located.

The agreement is the result of a joint effort among Warner, Essex Corp., the Department of Defense, and JMU's Office of Economic Development and Partnership Programs.

John Noftsinger, special assistant to the president and director of economic development and partnership programs at JMU, said the project will combine the resources of JMU faculty and facilities with expertise in engineering, science and demining training from Essex Corp., with whom JMU has had an ongoing academic-industrial co-venture agreement since 1992.

Essex Corp. has made a longterm commitment as an industrial leader in the development of humanitarian demining information and training systems and products. Essex has been supporting the demining community for the past five years and is the developer for the DOD Mobile Demining Support System (MDSS). MDSS is based upon the MineFacts database, developed by Essex and recently distributed to all the nations of the world by former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.

The new center will provide education opportunities for faculty, students and staff from various disciplines across the university, initially including integrated science and technology, education, political science, health sciences and computer science, he said.

The center will provide overall program management services and be the focal point for presentation of specialized training, humanitarian conferences and seminars, and access to recognized experts in all disciplines related to demining. As a centralized entity, the center will provide comprehensive and rapid response to the Department of Defense, said Noftsinger.

The center also will provide coordination between the Department of Defense and numerous other organizations with humanitarian demining interests and efforts being carried out in a variety of locations worldwide, he added.

A central goal of the JMU demining center, said Noftsinger, will be to help determine how best to introduce and coordinate demining efforts into larger political/military plans for affected countries and to promote efforts that focus on the goal of self-sufficiency for those countries.

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Examples of activities fostering self-sufficiency include: incorporating demining as an element of reconstruction; developing demining programs into the host nation's industry as a self-help effort or an employment and business opportunity or government service project; and coordinating U.S. government efforts with other involved agencies including the Department of State, USAID, Non-Governmental Organizations and International Government Organizations.

The center's activities will build upon an existing system, the MDSS developed by Essex Corp., in assisting defense department requirements for new methods for safe and cost-effective demining training within foreign countries. The existing MDSS is a rugged, easily transportable, computer-based system with multilingual training modules on demining safety, technical issues and tool use.

Essex Corp. and JMU will assist in developing and incorporating additional modules for humanitarian demining mission planning, mine awareness and safety, said Noftsinger.

These new modules are needed for in-country work by military units who will evaluate their effectiveness and determine the potential for support to the demining program. Following the evaluation process, four additional systems will be assembled with materials specific to targeted geographic locations.

The modular units, which can be flown into mined sites, provide multimedia support to defense department personnel who will take advantage of the system's demining training, *MineFacts* database, mine awareness materials and humanitarian demining mission planning.

Another objective for the center will be to disseminate information about the demining initiative via various media, including: an Internet World Wide Web site; multimedia and video training modules; and traditional print and electronic publications including technical reports, a quarterly journal and conference proceedings.

As yet another objective, the Essex/JMU team will develop a series of case studies highlighting not only success stories and best practices of defense department personnel in afflicted countries but also potential pitfalls.

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And finally, said Noftsinger, symposia are planned to be held on the JMU campus, where large public conferences as well as small, focused groups can be accommodated.

These "Shenandoah Symposia" expect to open with a three-day symposium focusing on current issues in humanitarian demining, to be held in June of 1997. Participants will be invited from governments around the world as well as non-governmental organizations, industry representatives, university faculty and other interested individuals.

Instrumental in the collaborative effort were Warner; Martin Every, senior vice president of Essex Corp.; the Department of Defense; and the JMU team, comprising President Ronald E. Carrier; Dr. Jackson Ramsey, provost of CISAT; Dr. Bethany Oberst, vice president for academic affairs; and Noftsinger, who spearheaded the effort.

The project is the result of the efforts of JMU's new Office of Economic Development and Partnership Programs which began operation in January of 1996 to promote economic development in the region, facilitate economic initiatives and to provide a central source for dissemination of information. The office focuses on connecting the resources of the institution across disciplinary and organizational boundaries to advance the regional economy and address pressing societal challenges.

"This is an unusual collaboration between federal government, state government and Essex Corp.," said Noftsinger, adding that "It will provide a cost-effective service for the Department of Defense and allow JMU faculty, staff and students to become engaged in solving a perplexing worldwide problem. Furthermore, the location of a Department of Defense support project in Harrisonburg is a major step in achieving our goal of making the region a center of high technology activity."

Additional information about the project may be obtained by calling Noftsinger's office at (540) 568-2700.

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