



Navy expo draws businesses

Community, military make connections

By Scott Hadly
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The Navy hung out its help-wanted shingle Thursday, letting locals know it is not only hiring but also is interested in doing business.

At the second annual Military Business & Community Expo, local business owners learned how to work with Naval Base Ventura County and the military in general, said Capt. Jim McHugh, commanding officer of the base.

Sponsored by the Ventura County Economic Development Association, the Navy League and the Regional Defense Partnership for the 21st Century, the event was also meant to help businesses navigate the sometimes complex system of federal contracting, McHugh said, during opening remarks to the more than 100 attendees.

The base pumps about \$1.67 billion a year into the region's economy and directly or indirectly employs 19,000 people, according to a study released last year by the Navy.

Ryan Gomez, who runs Precision Concept Designs, a small mechanical design and drafting company in Oxnard, just wants a little piece of that pie.

"That's the idea," said Gomez, walking Thursday among tables with information on everything from marketing with the Navy to securing large and small military contracts.

"It's really feast or famine in business right now, so I'd like to learn about how I might get into that," said Gomez, who has done a little military subcontracting, helping to do blueprints for a forklift used on an aircraft carrier.

In his opening remarks, Bill Buratto, president and CEO of the Economic Development Association, said the event was meant to help people like Gomez by giving them an introduction to the process.

Capt. Dave Fleisch, the base's chief staff officer, said the expo changed slightly from last year to give attendees more information on navigating the military contracting system and help them network with officers involved in contracting.

The event also highlighted the need for future employees. More than 40 percent of the base's civilian workers are expected to retire in the next six years, according to a recent survey. That means it will need hundreds of new engineers and others to fill those vacancies. Local Navy leaders said they want to work with universities and colleges to cultivate young engineers and scientists locally.

Richard Rush, president of CSU Channel Islands in Camarillo, gave the keynote speech and said much still needs to be done within the education system to prepare students for those jobs. A "cold hard look" at the state of education, with students unprepared in math and science, shows we've got a long way to go, Rush said.