

Cypress History in El Paso

From 1996 to 2003, I was Senior Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development for the El Paso Chamber of Commerce. Dee Margo, our current mayor, was the Chairman of the Chamber committee with oversight of my organization. As a part of my duties, I had developed a strong working relationship with the leadership of Ft. Bliss. Dee was the former Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army, so he had a close relationship also.

Major General Jack Costello, the CG of Ft. Bliss at the time, called a meeting with Mayor Carlos Ramirez, County Judge Jim Maddox, Dee Margo and myself. His purpose was to inform us that he strongly believed that the Army was going to close Ft. Bliss. They had moved the 3rd Calvary from Ft. Bliss to Ft. Carson, in the 1995 BRAC, leaving Ft. Bliss with only 9,000 soldiers. He told us he was hearing rumors the Bliss would be closed as an action of the 2005 BRAC. We realized that we were in trouble. My committee decided that we needed professional help. We contacted three defense related consultants in the D.C. area and I went to interview them. Our friends at Raytheon had recommended Cypress International because they used them as their prime consultant. After the interviews, I agreed that they were the best by far. I reported that to Dee and my committee and they voted to send Dee and I back to D.C. to hire them. We entered into a three year contract. They were immediately helpful to our efforts. They told us whom to meet with in the Pentagon and in Congress. They helped us set up appointments and design presentations to these federal officials.

In one of our first meetings, Major General Larry Lust, who was the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management of the Army, said, "we understand you have a water problem in El Paso." We knew at that time that the Army would never send another soldier to Ft. Bliss. We conferred with Cypress about this issue and decided we needed a bold move to change the Army's perception of our water situation. We decided to offer to build a desalination plant on Ft. Bliss to provide water to Ft. Bliss for many years to come. We offered to do this at no cost to the Army. The rest is history. In the BRAC of 2005, Ft. Bliss was named the number one Army installation in the country and the 1st Armored Division was assigned to Ft. Bliss, bringing almost 20,000 new soldiers.

If we hadn't hired Cypress we would never have met with the key leadership in the Pentagon, with the correct message. Especially MG Lust. Without that meeting Ft. Bliss would probably be closed right now. We have definitely gotten our monies worth.

After Dee Margo was elected Mayor, he decided he wanted to re-engage Cypress. He asked the Chamber, which had a new president and Borderplex, which has no one with any military experience, to partner with the City to re-hire Cypress. When both the Chamber and Borderplex reneged on the contract. Our group stepped in. With Cary Westin, Deputy City Manager's help, we negotiated with Cypress to lower the amount of the contract from \$220,000 per year to \$170,000. We eliminated some of their economic development responsibilities related to Borderplex. We also wanted Cypress to take a regional approach to their efforts. We realized the importance of the triad of Ft. Bliss, Holloman and WSMR. Our group, which operates under the umbrella of the Chamber, agreed to raise \$60,000 per year as our portion of the \$170,000. The City of El Paso is responsible for the remaining \$110,000. We are asking Alamogordo and Las Cruces to participate as partners in the effort to maintain and grow our bases.

We are also asking Cypress to help us attract defense related companies to our region. They have both retired Army and Air Force employees who can help us reach our goals. They have a proven track record and we urge you to be part of this effort.

A.F. "Tom" Thomas