



## **WASTE REPORT for August 1, 2016**

### **Fort Belvoir's \$6 Million Mess**

Last November, Fort Belvoir's "Eagle's Nest" Dining Facility completed a **\$6 million renovation, and last month (less than a year later), the facility closed its doors permanently.**<sup>1</sup>

According to the base newspaper, *Belvoir Eagle*, the project "included installing new flooring; ceilings; lights; bathrooms and serving lines; and replacing all of the furniture," with a representative of the facility even quoted as saying, "[w]e really are a premier dining facility, now."<sup>2</sup> Seven months later, Fort Belvoir's website read, "[e]ffective July 1, 2016 the Fort Belvoir Dining Facility will be officially, permanently closed."<sup>3</sup>

The shocking part is not that the Army is closing the facility after the renovation, but that the renovation was done in the first place. **According to the Army, the facility only had less than a 5 percent utilization rate.**<sup>4</sup> Of course, Fort Belvoir is just south of Alexandria, VA, next to George Washington's home at Mt. Vernon. With Starbucks, Subway, and Burger King on base, and numerous restaurants and grocery stores just a short drive in either direction on Route 1 (which bisects the base), it is not surprising that even a remodeled base dining facility would have trouble competing.

To understand why the Eagle's Nest renovation was such a boondoggle, you first need to understand how the Army feeds personnel on the home front. In addition to their regular pay, military personnel receive one of two types of food assistance: Subsistence-In-Kind (SIK), where a soldier walks into an Army cafeteria and receives a meal, and Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS), a tax-free, additional benefit added to a soldier's pay for them to purchase food wherever they see fit.

Base dining facilities' (like the Eagle's Nest) primary purpose is to serve personnel on SIK plans, although they do take cash customers at reduced rates. But with more and more private food options on base, or in local communities, fewer personnel are taking SIK plans. This is why, last August, the Army decided to explore closing mess halls operating at less than 65 percent of capacity based on SIK users.<sup>5</sup>

**This meant certain closure at Fort Belvoir, where not one person is on the SIK plan.<sup>6</sup> That's \$6 million of taxpayer money down the garbage disposal. Imagine the cost if the second phase, a kitchen remodel, had taken place!**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.govexec.com/defense/2016/06/army-spent-millions-renovate-doomed-dining-hall/128830/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.belvoireagleonline.com/news/top\\_stories/newly-renovated-dining-facility-opens/article\\_be318796-8ec7-11e5-9461-8f305d3f71c8.html](http://www.belvoireagleonline.com/news/top_stories/newly-renovated-dining-facility-opens/article_be318796-8ec7-11e5-9461-8f305d3f71c8.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.belvoir.army.mil/eateries/DiningFacility.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.govexec.com/defense/2016/06/army-spent-millions-renovate-doomed-dining-hall/128830/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/2016/02/08/army-1-3-dining-facilities-close-shrink-within-three-years/79696652/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.govexec.com/defense/2016/06/army-spent-millions-renovate-doomed-dining-hall/128830/>

# **Today's Menu: Waste with a side of poor planning**