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## They have a cure for 60-mile commutes MORE INFORMATION

July 5, 2008 12:15 am

By KELLY HANNON

It was a typical day at work for Mal McLeod, a chemical engineer for the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Caroline County resident took calls, sent e-mails and retrieved reports from his Army Corps of Engineers computer files.

But he did it all from a telework center in Spotsylvania County instead of his downtown DC office.

"It's not just a convenience," said McLeod, who teleworks every Tuesday and Friday. "It's a lifestyle change."



Last Friday, it took McLeod 12 minutes to drive to the telework center in the Southpoint shopping center off U.S. 1. Three days a week, when he rides the Virginia Railway Express train to Union Station and walks the final 20 minutes to his office, it takes 2 hours and 15 minutes each way.

"In this day and age, very few people get up and walk across the building to find somebody," said McLeod, who's been teleworking for four years. "They're going to pick up the phone, maybe send you an e-mail. Well, it comes in just as well down here as it does up there."

He estimates that 90 percent of his work can be done over the phone, typing on a computer or using e-mail.

"This is just the way people's jobs have gone because of technology," McLeod said.

Interest is growing in the Fredericksburg area's three telework centers, called the NoCommute .Org centers.

Traffic, limited time with family, and record-high gasoline prices are squeezing workers financially and emotionally, said Peter Garcia, telework facility manager for the George Washington Regional Commission.

The Commission operates centers in Spotsylvania, Stafford and Woodbridge, but Spotsylvania is the largest facility.

Allowing workers to shorten their commutes makes them more productive, Garcia said.

"Morale is up because they don't have to worry about driving 60 miles one way, 60 miles another way, sitting four, five hours in traffic," Garcia said. "They get more time with the family, and they're spending less money on gas and maintenance."

The telework centers are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Registered users get an access code.

Workers choose their seats through an online reservation system.

The Spotsylvania center has an open floor plan of cubicles, but new furniture is coming. Every teleworker will have a 6-foot by 6-foot cubicle with a sliding door, allowing for greater privacy. The redesign will increase the number of workspaces from 34 to 40.

Last Friday, 18 workers had reservations for desks. Mondays and Fridays are the busiest days, Garcia said, although there is ample room for newcomers. Most desks have new Gateway computers with flat-screen monitors, and several stations have wireless Internet connections for laptops.

Working with the U.S. General Services Administration, the telework centers are wired to let federal employees connect with their office computers using keyboard Common Access Card readers.

Nearly all of the employees at the center are federal workers--99 percent, said Keith Lesser, telework operations specialist for the George Washington Regional Commission.

Under a recently passed House of Representatives bill, federal workers would be allowed to telecommute for 20 percent of their hours every two weeks.

The daily rate for a federal worker to use a local telework center is \$26, paid by the employee's agency.

The rate is \$50 a day for a private user, slightly less if the user signs a contract to work one day per week for a month: \$42.50.

While that may seem high compared with the use of a personal computer at home, Lesser said the center provides perks.

In addition to the free office and mailing supplies, there is free printing, free photocopying, free faxing and free coffee. There's a conference room to take calls in private. Plus, Garcia provides instant IT support.

Once, he fixed an IT problem from a cruise ship while he was on vacation.

"We can service any of these centers from anywhere in the world with our laptop," Garcia said.

McLeod said he doesn't have access to firewall security protection or a T1 Internet connection at home, so the center is better equipped for work.

"Coming into a place like this, you get away from the distractions that are at home," McLeod said.

Working from the telework center on Thursdays and Fridays changed the life of Vickie Perry, another Caroline County resident. She's a manpower analyst for the Navy. Her commute to the Navy Yard in

Washington in her hybrid vehicle can take 90 minutes each way.

She was a teleworking pioneer in her office when she started four years ago.

"Your supervisor has to trust you not to stay gone the whole time," Perry said, "you know, come in at 10, leave at 2, things like that."

She finds that she accomplishes more work on Thursdays and Fridays because she can arrive earlier and stay later.

"Everything I need I can get here. I get my e-mail. I have a phone set up here; people can call and leave messages," Perry said. "People can reach you just as well."

The centers are gearing up for a busy summer. Lesser just received a call from someone who works from home year-round, but needs a quiet space for a few months. "His kids are home from school," Lesser said.

Garcia and Lesser are giving center tours to employees and managers.

And a new sign went up outside, pointing the way to the center, which is next to the Social Security Administration office.

"We're the best-kept secret," Lesser said, "and we don't want to be."

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Want to know more about teleworking from the Fredericksburg area?

Federal workers:

[telework.gov](http://telework.gov).

A site maintained by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and U.S. General Services Administration.

For all workers:

[nocommute.org](http://nocommute.org).

The George Washington Regional Commission-sponsored site.

## CENTER LOCATIONS

Spotsylvania

4956 Southpoint Parkway

Stafford

24 Onville Road

Suite 201

Woodbridge

13546 Minnieville Road

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540/710-5002 or klesser @nocommute.org

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