

# West Virginia at center of biometrics charge

## North Central region home of Army's Biometrics Fusion Center and extensive research at WVU

by Jim Fisher  
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG — North Central West Virginia has long been touted as the nation's epicenter for biometrics, the science of identifying people by bodily characteristics.

From the extensive biometric research and education programs at West Virginia University to the U.S. Army's Biometrics Fusion Center in the Clarksburg/Bridgeport area, the science of identification has taken root. Sandwiched in between is the FBI's fingerprint identification and storage center.

And it appears this is just the beginning.

In mid-November, Clarks-

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Sam Cava



burg native Sam Cava was tapped to lead the Biometrics Fusion Center, which essentially tests and evaluates emerging technology. The local center is the implementation arm of the Biometrics Management Office, based in Washington, D.C.

Eventually, much of the

responsibility of the management office will be shifted to the fusion center, further solidifying North Central West Virginia's claim as the worldwide leader in biometrics.

"I think it lends a great deal of credibility to the area and should be a good indicator of the Department of Defense's

commitment to the Biometrics Fusion Center," Cava said.

Because biometrics still is essentially in its infancy, a strong presence is needed in Washington, D.C., Cava said. Once the center becomes more established and the necessary groundwork has been laid by the management office, much of the overall responsibility will shift here, and to Cava.

"We are very committed and focused on growing this agency," Cava said.

By necessity, Cava was unable to reveal many specifics about advances in the past year or plans for the coming months. He did say that the center's staff is trying to "focus more on the warfighter and support global operations."

Presumably, that means the local center is very involved in the country's ongoing war on terrorism, as well as the presence in the Middle East and other hot spots abroad.

"Our goal is to become the principal source of biometrics in the DOD," Cava said.

Prior to taking the government job, Cava was head of the WVU Forensic and Biometric Development program.

"It was a hard decision to leave WVU. I really enjoyed my time there," he said.

But his ties to that school will undoubtedly help move the Biometrics Fusion Center forward, Cava said. Both entities are moving in the right direction, and being this close to an institution of higher learning

will bring a wealth of opportunities, he said.

"It's a great source of fresh young talent," he said.

Prior to his work at WVU, Cava was a member of the U.S. Air Force, where he served in several intelligence-related assignments. He holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from WVU.

The Biometrics Fusion Center has been in this area for nearly four years and employs more than 50 people in two locations: The primary center at Harrison-Marion Regional Airport and an annex facility at the Eastpointe Business Park near the Division of Motor Vehicles' offices.

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## BIOMETRICS

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At some point, the two offices are expected to be consolidated into one temporary facility in downtown Clarksburg.

A lease for the late Tom Keeley's building at 347 W. Main St. has been in effect since June. The contract is for a three-year lease with two additional one-year options. The annual rent is estimated at \$456,750.

The 29,870-square-foot facility is expected to include a state-of-the-art demonstration center and a testing and evaluation laboratory space.

But no one really seems to know when, or if, that will happen.

Cava and two spokesmen for BRTRC, the Biometrics Fusion Center's media repre-

sentative, said they did not handle that aspect of the center. All government leasing is done through the General Services Administration, they said. That agency negotiated the lease and is billing the Army.

But Bob Shaw, who handles real estate for the GSA, said it was up to the Army to decide a timetable.

A permanent Biometrics Fusion Center is slated to be built on the FBI grounds, possibly beginning as early as 2006.

When complete, the permanent site will house 150-175 employees, infuse between \$18 million and \$20 million into the state's economy annually and open the door for new private-sector investments.

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Staff file photo

Biometrics has a wide range of uses, including the one demonstrated in this photo. This device takes 100 measurements of the palm to verify identity before unlocking a door at Robert C. Byrd High School.