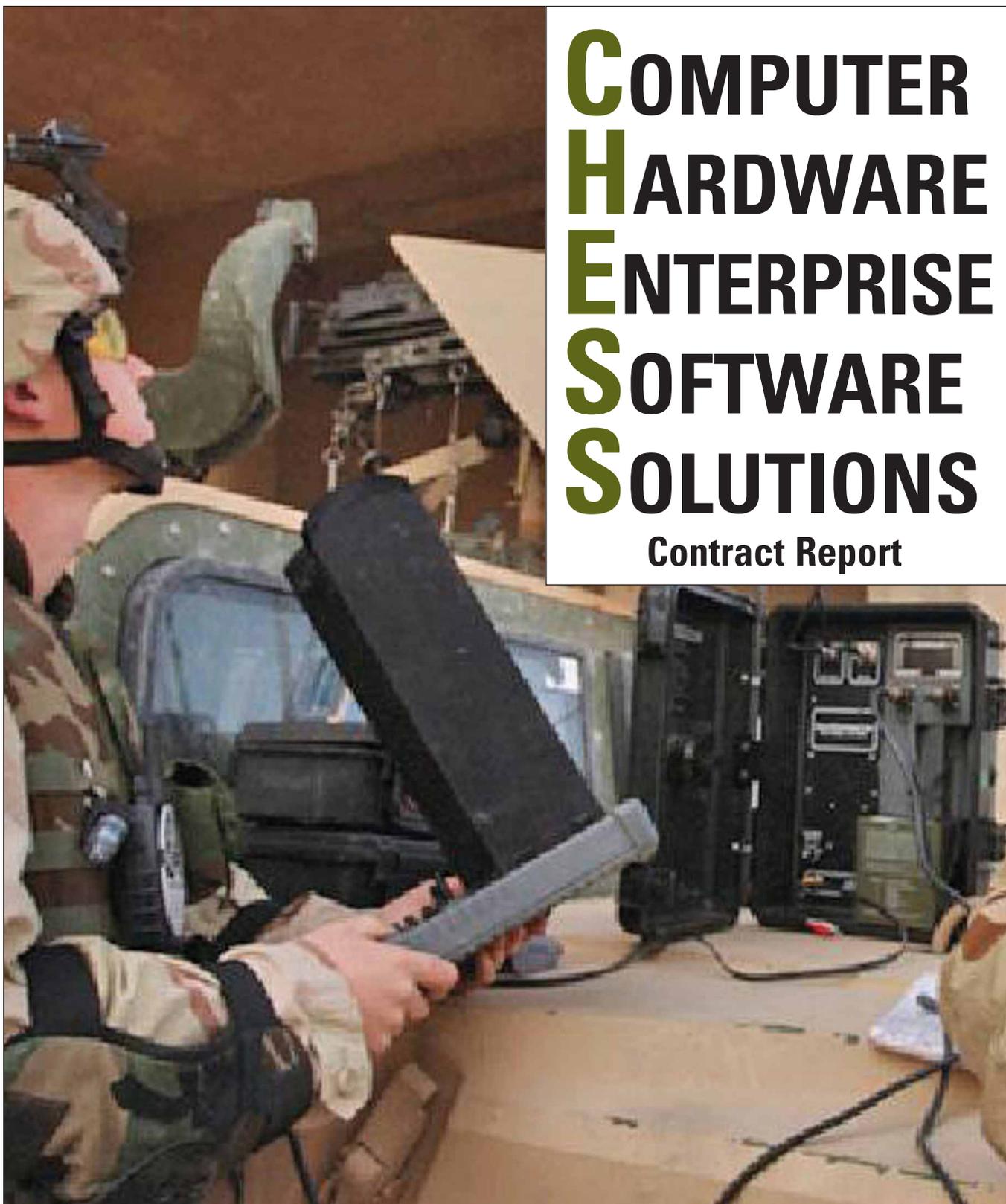


COMPUTER HARDWARE ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

Contract Report



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CHES: A New Name, Continuing A Mighty Mission

Computer Hardware, Enterprise Software and Solutions (CHES) has the mission to support all Army customers' commercial IT requirements – quickly and economically. Visit them at: <https://ascp.monmouth.army.mil>.

What a difference a year makes.

Last year, the popular ADMC-2 and ITES-2H & 2S IDIQs were the flagships of the very successful Army Small Computing Program (ASCP).

The ongoing success of the contracts was rewarded when this year the Army gave the program a new name – Computer Hardware, Enterprise Software and Solutions (CHES).

Leading the CHES team is program manager Micki LaForgia. “I have a lot to say about this program,” LaForgia told 1105 Custom Media in a recent interview.

“It is important to get the word out to the Army on what this program has been doing and can continue to do,” in fulfilling its mission of supporting all Army customers' commercial IT requirements quickly and economically.

Name Change That Reflects Program Growth

LaForgia is proud that CHES customers think the program is doing a lot of things right! “However, a lot has changed since 1990 when we were indeed the Army's SMALL Computer Program (ASCP) and not widely known or used,” explained LaForgia.

CHES is the new name for the Army Small Computing Program (ASCP). It is the Army's Commercial Center of Excellence and “Primary Source” for Information Technology (IT) products and services.

Sales reached only about \$250 million in 1987. In 2002 sales grew to about \$650 million and in 2007 over \$1.5 billion, with Cost Avoidance/Savings to the Army in the hundreds of millions of dollars. ‘Small’ is no longer an appropriate descriptor said LaForgia.

Most customers knew that ASCP provided the latest computers, at the lowest prices and with the best Army standardization suite of software. But CHES is also the Army's Software Product Manager (SPM) representing all COTS software actions as part of the DoD Enterprise Software Initiative.

CHES' cost avoidance on enterprise software agreements was \$530 million in FY07. Customers, who may not have made the link between “Small Computers” and multi-million dollar software programs, now reach out to CHES.

Finally according to LaForgia, ITES contracts for services (2S) and high-end server hardware, including Information Assurance (IA) products (2H), valued at over \$25 billion, were not always associated with ASCP.

“CHES' let's customers know that we're a full-service enterprise IT provider.”

“With the endorsement of the Army's Business Initiative Council, the full support of the Army's CIO/G-6 office and the Army Acquisition Executive at ASA (ALT), CHES became the Army's “Primary Source” for commercial Information Technology,” explained LaForgia.

First Shot

That designation, incorporated into Army Regulation 25-1, “Army Knowledge Management and Information Technology,” requires all Army COTS IT customers to give CHES the “first shot” at meeting their requirements. Waivers are granted when the customers' requirements cannot be met through CHES contracts; and for the rare occasions when a customer can obtain the same item at a better price from another source, such as when it's part of an overarching agreement.

“We support all components of the Army – the sustaining base, the strategic planners, the power projectors and the Warfighters. Everything was “alright” with ASCP, but CHES supports the Army Enterprise and needed a name that reflects that mission,” said LaForgia.

The CHES program leverages the latest technology advances while making sure those products are compliant with current commercial, DoD and Army policy and standards. This is accomplished through the superb teaming relationship between CHES and its contract holders.

Through periodic meetings, vendors share their insight and plans for new product developments and CHES implements those changes by offering a wide range of

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state-of-the-art IT products at extremely competitive prices and yet compliant with Army requirements. These include such advancements as the Federal Desktop Core Configuration, IPv6, and “greening” criteria contained in

recent Executive Orders and measured by the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT). This team arrangement has allowed CHES to provide Army *continued on page s-viii*

Save Even More On Desktops and Notebooks Through September 30!

The CHES Consolidated Buy (CB) for Desktops and Notebooks is now going on through September 30, 2008. Start saving at: <https://ascp.monmouth.army.mil>.

The Army’s Consolidated Buy provides a temporary additional discount for desktops and notebooks off of CHES’ already discounted ADMC-2 contract prices.

So far, the response to this year’s CB has been phenomenal according to CHES PM Micki LaForgia.

LaForgia explained that normal volume on the website is about 200 concurrent users and “we were having 700 to 800 concurrent hits and we think it’s because the CB opened.”

“That’s great news,” said LaForgia. “The word is getting out there. People are waiting for the buy to open to buy their IT and that’s terrific.”

LaForgia is looking to top last year’s end of year CB when 130,000 units were sold. “This year people were just waiting. One of our vendors told me they had a thousand phone calls yesterday about the CB. So it is definitely taking off,” said LaForgia.

The objective of the CB is to reduce Army costs for desktops and notebooks and standardize the information technology enterprise. CB configurations are based upon the specifications contained in the NETCOM Army Enterprise Desktop Standardization. All products offered are in compliance with DOD, Army and NETCOM standards. Two desktop, two notebook and two monitor categories are offered. New for CB7 is a rugged/semi-rugged category. Hardware categories consist of:

Small Form Factor – A platform targeted for typical office automation skills such as word processing, spreadsheet manipulation, or presentation slide development. Platform intended for well defined missions with a low risk of expansion throughout the platform’s lifecycle.

Mini-Tower – A platform targeted for office automation with higher performance requirements such as database operations, analytical analysis, programming, basic engineering functions, etc. Platform intended to provide expansion capabilities (more

memory, storage, or expansion cards) to address changing mission needs over the platform’s lifecycle.

Mainstream Notebook – A desktop replacement platform targeted to provide office automation functions such as word processing, spreadsheet manipulation, or presentation slide development. Processor provides adequate performance for office automation, incorporates docking station or port replicator to facilitate mobility but general size and weight may limit heavy travel use.

Specialty Notebook – A platform targeted at a wide range of missions from small light weight road warrior platforms to large processor intensive platforms. This wide range of performance requires trade-off analysis between processing power, size/weight, and battery life.

Ruggedized Notebook – A platform targeted for missions where users encounter harsh environmental conditions. This category encompasses a wide range of environmental performance thresholds and requires trade-off analysis between processing power, size/weight, environmental characteristics and battery life to determine what best meets the user’s needs.

Army customers can view the CB products on the CHES website, the “*it e-mart*”. A web-based tool allows customers to easily compare the CB offerings from various vendors in order to make their award determination.

According to LaForgia, the CB has been extremely successful with Army customers. They appreciate the ease of ordering and the deep discounts (up to 49%) available.

“No Army user is left out of sharing in savings that usually accrue to only the larger volume buyers. CHES’ twice per year Consolidated Buy does just that,” explained LaForgia. “It consolidates the Army’s total requirements, gets exceptional pricing from its Prime Vendors, and allows the buyer of one system to save as much, on a pro-rated basis, as the buyer of 1,000 systems.”

Source: CHES

Access CHES Contract Via Customer Friendly Web Tools

With the CHES *"it e-mart"*, CHES's very own electronic e-commerce ordering system, customers can order IT products and services, request quotes from vendors, do configuration checking, and search across our contracts right from their computer via the Internet.

You would think that the organization that supplies the entire Army with IT would number in the hundreds. Not so according to CHES PM Micki LaForgia.

"We are an extremely small office," said LaForgia. She explained that people are surprised when they see our organization chart.

"People can't believe we are providing the entire Army with hardware and software with only 15 people doing all of the customer service and strategizing and about the same number of contractors doing technical work."

Under the CHES umbrella are ADMC-2, ITES-2H and ITES-2S. They allow decentralized ordering by COs worldwide. There is no fee and customers are assured products and services they procure are fully compliant with all Army and DoD IT standards and policies.

That's why the CHES website is so important to the program's success. "We see our website as a force multiplier," said LaForgia. To make it even more customer friendly, the CHES team has embarked upon website improvements, including the implementation of version 2 of the *"it e-mart"*.

"We are just about ready to begin testing the new system, but we didn't want to do it during the CB," said LaForgia. Plus the end of the FY is always a very busy time and the CHES team is taking no chances during the CB and postponed the tests. But LaForgia and her team expects to test after September and the new features to be fully operational by the end of 2008.

New and Improved

"We are sprucing up the colors," said LaForgia. "We are going Army green." So, while the look may not be very different, the search capability will be.

Currently you can search through products and probably get more than you want to see. New will be a much more refined search.

"We are pretty good at the searching of products by part

numbers and designators like desktop notebook, but if there policy on the web, it is difficult to plug in a search term and scan everything or be up more than you wanted," said LaForgia.

"That will be greatly improved and we will have collection features that we don't have now that will make the site even more customer oriented." For example, look for an interactive FAQ section where many of the questions the CHES team receives will be answered.

Contract Facts

Each contract has a dedicated CHES Product Leader who is available to assist customers. CHES further supports its customers through its Help Desk and the *"it e-mart"* on the CHES website. Through these many CHES resources, customers can obtain information on products and services, request quotes or proposals, check the status of their orders, review contract terms and conditions and use their government credit card to purchase IT products.

ADMC-2 – This is the Army's primary source for commercial off-the-shelf desktops, notebooks, ruggedized and semi-ruggedized devices, video teleconferencing equipment, printers and peripherals. ADMC-2 allows for limited services which include installation, asset tagging, imaging, site surveys and system configuration. The Army utilizes the ADMC-2 contracts to conduct its semi-annual Consolidated Buy.

ITES 2-H: This program support the Army enterprise infrastructure goals with a full range of server, storage, client and networking products and solutions compliant with existing standardization and interoperability policies. ITES-2H has been designated as Army's source for its approved Information Assurance (IA) products.

ITES-2S: This provides IT support services that support and enhance centralized operation and management as defined by the Army CIO/G-6. The services provided by ITES-2S support the Army's portion of the Global Information Grid (GIG) and network-centric warfighting objectives.

ITS-SB: Coming soon are the Information Technology Services – Small Business (ITS-SB) small business set-asides. These will provide IT services to CONUS locations for task areas not currently provided through existing CHES vehicles. □

CHES Perspectives:

For CHES to succeed requires a team effort. Leading the team is program manager Micki LaForgia. She spoke for the team about CHES in this interview with 1105 Custom Media.

Q. 1105 Custom Media

The Army Small Computing Program was well-known. Why change your name to CHES?

A. Micki LaForgia

We wanted to get better. I think we were well known as the Army's Small Computing Program, but the people who knew us, knew us.

(For example) there were people in the CIO and G6 world who knew who we were and we had some good computer deals.

But the rest of the Army community didn't know us as well. Even some of the folks who were buying computers didn't know that we were the provider of the software licenses.

If you took the cost avoidance and the security enhancements that we were providing on the hardware side and replicate those throughout the entire Army, well there was just no where to go but up with this program. So, it is important to get that word out.

Q. 1105 Custom Media

Explain about the Consolidated Buy, currently running through September 30?

A. Micki LaForgia

It's definitely taking off. Yesterday, my website manager told me that our normal volume on the website is about 200 concurrent users; yesterday we were having 700 to 800 concurrent hits and we think it's because the CB opened.

That's great. The word is getting out there. People were waiting for the buy to open to buy their IT. When we did the first CB at the end of FY05, people were coming in reluctantly due to the direction of the Army CIO and G6 to leverage the Army's buying power. There was a lot of hesitation, but here we are at the third end of the year CB. Last year at the end of year we sold 130,000 units and this year people were just waiting. One of our vendors told me they had a thousand phone calls yesterday about the CB.

Q. 1105 Custom Media

How can you streamline the procurement process?

A. Micki LaForgia

CHES provides pre-competed IDIQ contracts for hardware and services against which contracting officers may award delivery and/or task orders using the FAR Part

16 Fair Opportunity process.

In the case of the Consolidated Buy of Desktops and Notebooks, even the Fair Opportunity competition has already been conducted by CHES' designated contracting activity, the Information Technology Electronic Commerce and Commercial Contracting Center (ITEC4), so most contracting professionals need only access the CHES website.

Q. 1105 Custom Media

You've described the CHES website as a "force multiplier". Can you talk about some of its customer friendly features?

A. Micki LaForgia

Customers can use the "it e-mart", to view side-by-side comparisons of the product specifications and prices, evaluate the offers and issue an order. The "it e-mart" is THE Army e-commerce site for commercial IT!

We are only a short period of time away from fielding "it e-mart", version 2 that will provide even more information to the procurement personnel at posts, camps and stations so they can optimize their IT dollars while increasing local user performance capabilities. The "it e-mart" allows customers to easily fulfill their commercial IT acquisition requirement for products and services. "it e-mart" allows a customer to send a Request for Quote (RFQ) for IT products easily. Since 2004 "it e-mart" has sent over 123,168 RFQs. In 2006, Request for Proposal (RFP) for services was added to streamline the process of getting a quote for IT services. Since that time there have been over 7,730 RFPs submitted through "it e-mart".

These two features alone save our customers time by effectively and efficiently communicating to our vendors the exact requirement without having to call or submit paperwork numerous times through manual processes. Our online catalog has over 37,000 products representing just a portion of what is offered on our contract vehicles. It's no wonder "it e-mart" has nearly 500,000 registered customers.

In the updated version, the same features such as Requesting a Waiver, Requesting a Microsoft license, comparing IT products, submitting RFQs and RFPs will be available.

Features such as a new search engine and a site map will allow customers to find products and documents much more easily while navigating the site more effectively. All the information on our contracts, new policies, directives, and helpful information will also be available. The “*it e-mart*” is a total solution to streamline and assist with the acquisition of commercial IT products and services.

Q. 1105 Custom Media
Can you talk about CHESS training?

A. Micki LaForgia

Training has become a core competency for us and we are constantly travelling. This is a good thing. I’ve been here 4 years and when I came on board people would call and they would say “we heard we have to use your program”, could you come down and brief us.

Now we get calls, “we heard you guys got the best deals, can you send someone out to someone out here to brief us on your program?”

Because of demand we are about to make a video so we can send modules out because some customers just want to know about ESI; some about the CB.

Q. 1105 Custom Media
There is so much emphasis on Green and the FDCC these days. What is CHESS doing in these areas?

A. Micki LaForgia

This is an area where we were ahead of the curve. When a statute is passed, it takes time to get the statute implemented through a regulation. We have a tech support team that is constantly aware and following what’s going on. So when the statutes were passed, the vendors know what’s coming, so they build to those standards.

We had all those standards in our products before it became a standard of the Army. When someone would say, “oh look there is a FDCC” we already had it; the same thing with EPEAT.

We were way out in the forefront letting our vendors knowing what is coming down the pike. Since we do sell state-of-the-art equipment, they were geared up for it, so we didn’t have to do any backfill to be prepared for the new technologies.

Q. 1105 Custom Media

How do you deal with products being not up to date or “in scope”?

A. Micki LaForgia

That’s one of the concerns that some customers used to have and I hope they are over that. When I first came here and the CB started, there was talk that we were offering good prices because we are selling obsolete stuff or what their vendors are putting on sale to move out of their warehouses.

First of all most vendors don’t warehouse; they build to order. And because we have constant competition on the contracts, everybody wants to provide what people want to buy.

The vendors are competing to give us the best and the latest. In fact a couple of times, they were racing the clock to be ready for the CB. They had a new product coming out and they were just praying they got it out on time.

In fact, because we are loading everything with Microsoft VISTA this time, we had a small delay that allowed one of vendors to add a brand new model.

So, no one should ever be concerned they are not getting the state-of-the-art stuff that meets all the current requirements and are what are going to become current requirements. And there is no problem with being in scope because the contracts are catalogued based. If it is approved for sale in the catalogue and the specs are validated to meet Army and Netcom standards, then it’s OK. It’s a continuous refresh of products. □

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users with virtually automatic compliance with Army IT policy and standards.

Growing ESI with CHES

Another area that is growing for CHES is the Enterprise Software Initiative (ESI). The ESI was created in late 1990s when someone at DOD realized that if you put all the DOD services together, the Department had some big buying power and that should be leveraged. Thus the ESI was developed. It was so successful in the agreements that it put together that OMB asked that these agreements be made available to civilian agencies. Many became SmartBUYs and if an agreement has that designation, it is mandatory for all federal agencies to buy through that initiative.

“They keep identifying new products they want to convert to SmartBUY,” said LaForgia. “The G6 designated this program back in the early 2000s and little by little it has been growing and now it is phenomenal.”

CHES is the SPM for the newly awarded ESI agreements for asset management software licenses, maintenance, and services with awards to five companies. Four of them have been designated as GSA SmartBUY Agreements and are open for ordering by all Federal Government agencies according to LaForgia.

Some reasons for using ESI agreements are you get favorable terms and conditions that maximize license value and cost avoidance; a reduction of acquisition and contract administration costs for duplicative contracts; a reduction of software company bid and proposal costs (translates into savings); expert advice available to customers (i.e., Ordering Guide, individual advice/assistance from SPMs) at no additional cost and throughout the requirements and acquisition cycle; and finally avoidance of duplicate license purchases by sharing historical information on individual agency purchases (SPMs can provide asset management data and reports)

With ADMC, ITES and ESI, CHES has outgrown its ASCP days.

“When we went through the name change, there was a concern,” said LaForgia, “because we were so well known as ASCP.”

“But I think at this point our reputation as being the premier provider of the top, state-of-the-art equipment and especially with the enhanced security features and the prices we are providing is well known,” said LaForgia.

“People are looking for us even if they didn’t know we became CHES.” You can find them at <https://ascp.monmouth.army.mil>. □

Industry Insight

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