

Aerospace and Aviation
By Lauren Serrato

When thinking about Arizona, some common associations are the Grand Canyon, cacti or of course the triple digit temperatures.

What many don't know however, is the strong presence of aerospace and aviation in the state, specifically the West Valley as there are more than 80 aerospace and aviation businesses and 5,230 employees.

Arizona currently ranks 7th for aerospace manufacturing attractiveness, and ranks in the top 20 for cost, labor, infrastructure, industry strength, economy and tax policy for aerospace manufacturing attractiveness.

The West Valley's aerospace and defense sector has seen significant growth with tech companies like Boeing, General Dynamics, Honeywell Inc., Northrop Grumman and Raytheon Missile Systems all having operations throughout Arizona.

Located in the heart of Glendale, Luke Air Force Base trains 75% of the world's F-35 pilots, serving as one of the many highlights in the city. Since 1941, Luke has graduated over 61,000 pilots.

"I'm extremely proud to have Luke Air Force Base in Glendale," Glendale Mayor Jerry P. Weiers said.

"This military installation is without a doubt valued by all in the West Valley. As the mayor of Glendale, one of my primary goals is to ensure that Luke Air Force Base has the resources and support it needs to remain viable for decades to come. For this to happen, Glendale and Luke Air Force Base work closely together on a targeted growth management plan, as the city approves new economic development surrounding the base. In 1995, the city of Glendale completed the annexation for Luke Air Force Base, which protects the base from encroaching development."

Luke Air Force Base continues to make an economic impact in Arizona, totaling \$2.4 billion. Additionally, in 2019 Arizona became the first state to recognize out-of-state occupational licenses, which in the instance of a military spouse moving to Arizona, their occupational license transfers with them in an easy state registration process.

"This benefits Glendale by providing additional professionals to the area workforce," Weiers said. "Luke Air Force Base will always have my support and total commitment to preserving their mission."

The West Valley alone is home to airports including Buckeye Municipal, Glendale Municipal, Pleasant Valley and Phoenix Goodyear Airport.

While the Phoenix Goodyear Airport is owned and operated by the city of Phoenix Aviation Department, it is located in the city limits of the city of Goodyear.

The airport is classified as a General Aviation Reliever Airport, meaning it relieves Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport of General Aviation traffic. General Aviation is all of aviation, except for commercial passenger traffic from airline service.

“GA incorporates business aircraft, flight training, personal aircraft use, medivac flights, and all other forms of aviation,” Brad Hagen, Phoenix Goodyear Airport Manager said.

“Goodyear Airport has three primary business segments operating on the airport: Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul (MRO), flight training, and accommodating corporate aircraft. AerSale is a company that performs MRO service on large aircraft up to a B-767 aircraft. In addition to line maintenance, AerSale performs inspections, aircraft conversions, and can paint aircraft, as well as other services. GYR has significant flight training at the airport.”

United Airlines has a fully owned flight school at the airport, United Aviate Academy, that trains up to 400-500 students a year. An additional flight school, Fly Goodyear, also operates at the airport.

With its 8,501-foot runway, making it the second longest general aviation runway in Arizona and longest in the West Valley, the Phoenix Goodyear Airport is equipped with 256 acres of available land with runway access and 217 acres of developable land outside the fence.

“The Phoenix Goodyear Airport provides significant benefits for the West Valley through the creation of jobs and economic activity,” Hagen said.

“Airports are capital intensive, and there are ongoing construction projects at GYR that also support jobs and the economy. Additionally, taxes and fees are paid by airport businesses that create additional revenue to the city of Goodyear that can be used for the benefit of the city and residents. Many services vital to a community such as Police, Fire and Air Ambulance use the Airport as well.”

Surrounding the airport, there is approximately 2,500 total acres of developable land, which according to Hagen, continues to receive interest from respected businesses.

“Several on airport businesses are currently working with the airport to expand, and there are new businesses that have expressed interest in locating to GYR,” Hagen said.

“One on airport business is expanding through building new corporate hangars that can accommodate an additional 6-9 corporate aircraft at GYR. Another existing business is currently working with the airport to build a maintenance hangar that can accommodate four B-737 aircraft.”

Hagen added that the Phoenix Goodyear Airport helps economic development thrive in Goodyear.

“The airport helps economic development through the creation of jobs and opportunities for other businesses to expand and compete,” Hagen said.

“There are also studies that show one of the top questions prospective businesses ask is how close is the nearest airport. Businesses need to fly employees by both commercial airlines and some by corporate aircraft, which can be based in Goodyear. Aviation and aerospace development is not only important for the Phoenix Goodyear Airport, but it is also a target sector for the city of Goodyear. “

Less than half a mile away, Flite Goodyear serves the community as an additional asset to the city’s economic development growth.

The former Naval air station sits on about 1 million square feet of land with even more to build upon. There are currently nearly 30 buildings on the site.

“It's certainly been a hub for job growth,” Emily Currie, associate vice president with Colliers said. “Prior to this, there was one tenant with a lot of employees. But we've attracted a lot of new companies to Goodyear, and we've done well with preleasing. So I think it just benefits the city as a redevelopment project and as an employment hub.”

Currie said that Flite continues to grow right along with the city of Goodyear. In doing so, she added that there's still a touch of history instilled throughout, whether it be through murals, pieces of art or original buildings that date back to the 1940s.

“I think that's one of the beautiful things about what the owner and the landlord has done for Flite. We just got a picture of a new mural that went up and it has the old satellite, so he's really paying homage to and paying tribute to the radar technology and the satellite technology that came out of that center,” she said.

“He has a ton of historic pictures that show the history of the building. We have two huge dishes that he's repurposed as art. He's repurpose some of the industrial stuff into art. He's trying to really show the history even as we continue to grow here.”

With over 300 days of sunshine, Arizona proves itself to be the ideal location for flight operations, contributing to the ability to have over 54,000 employees in the state for aerospace and defense.

The aviation program at West-MEC is doing its part in preparing students to enter the growing and successful field. In Maricopa County alone there has been a 21% employment growth from 2015-2020 in aerospace production and parts manufacturing jobs.

West-MEC's aviation program started in August 2011. The FAA Certified Aviation Maintenance School is authorized to teach the FAA required standards in order to allow students to test for their Airframe and Powerplant Certificates.

“At West-MEC, we are an authorized written test site and one of our teachers is an authorized DME, which makes us a one stop shop for completion,” Troy Gabaldon, West-MEC Central Campus Administrator said.

“There are only 3 A&P schools running in Arizona; West-MEC, Chandler-Gilbert, Pima. We give the West Valley an opportunity that wasn't available prior to 2011. There is a great need right now in aviation for certified A&P mechanics and we're doing a great job in getting the students completed and ready for testing.

Since the launch of the program, serving as one of a handful of high schools in the country to offer Airframe and Powerplant certification, there have been nearly 250 graduates.

Gabaldon said the program has generated a multitude of success and opportunities for students, including partnering with Delta, American, United and Frontier to hire graduates.

While aerospace and aviation may not be the first thought when making a list of the West Valley's pros, it continues to grow, generate business development success and has proven its overall ability to serve as a positive impact on the state's economy.