

Luke air base gathering citizens' support on Web

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Susan Warwick and her husband, Kim, always have loved when the F-16 fighter jets from Luke Air Force Base fly over their Sun City West home.

"People complain about the noise, but those planes mean the world to us because it's the sound of freedom," said Susan Warwick. "There are phenomenal men and women up there protecting us every day and that makes us feel safe."

The Warwicks recently showed their support for Luke Air Force Base by having their names published on a Web site, www.lukeforward.com. The web page registers community support for the Glendale facility through the Fighter Country Partnership.

More than 400 people along with cities, town and other organizations have registered on the site. In addition, it's an opportunity for people to tell others of their support of making Luke an F-35 training ground.

Luke is considered by most communities in the West Valley to be a vital cog for national defense and also as a major player in the area's economy.

As development has moved closer to Luke, community leaders have banded together to keep that growth from jeopardizing the base's future. Absent from that alliance has been El Mirage, whose former Mayor Fred Waterman came under fire from other elected officials for questioning their integrity in dealing with Luke issues as well as expressing concern that the base was crimping his community's potential for growth.

Since Waterman's resignation last month, El Mirage has softened its stand regarding the base.

City officials said Thursday that they are continuing to study the potential noise impact on the community of F-35 jets, which Luke Air Force Base is campaigning to bring to its West Valley installation.

Through its public relations firm, the city said: "Despite concerns and opposition emanating from Virginia, Florida and, most recently, Tucson, about increased noise levels of the F-35 fighter aircraft, El Mirage has not yet taken a position opposing the F-35."

Luke Air Force Base supporters are in the process of organizing a promotional campaign encouraging the Air Force to locate the F-35 to replace the current F-16. However, most indications are that the F-35 will be louder than the F-16, but the levels are being debated and analyzed around the country.

El Mirage Government Relations Director Pat Dennis has sent a request for F-35 studies, details and other related material to her counterparts in West Valley cities.

Nancy Bierman, a Sun City West resident, said she isn't concerned about the noise level of the F-35s.

"I have to give the men and women of Luke credit for protecting us and the sound that I hear won't bother me because they're doing their best to protect us," said Bierman, who also has signed up on the Web site to support Luke.