

NEXT WEEK: A 16-page special section looking at what's at stake for Luke Air Force Base as the U.S. Department of Defense selects F-35 training bases.



F-35 training could bring Luke up to \$150M in upgrades

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If Luke Air Force Base is chosen as the training hub for the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the base could get as much as \$150 million worth of upgrades and construction work.

That would be a much-needed boost for the West Valley economy and the state's beleaguered construction sector, which is struggling to find private-sector work.

City of Glendale spokesman Jerry McCoy said if F-35 training comes to Luke, the base will receive upgrades to its runways and infrastructure, as well as its

training and technical operations.

"This is going to generate new construction jobs," said McCoy, adding it also would boost tax revenue for the West Valley. "There is a major ripple effect."

Luke AFB is located in Glendale, and



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that city has taken the lead in lobbying for F-35 training operations to be based there.

The base is the prime U.S. Air Force training center for F-16 fighter jets, and it's on the Pentagon's short list for F-35 training, along with bases in New Mexico and Florida. The military is phasing out the F-16 in favor of the F-35.

Luke boosters are concerned that Luke might be closed if the U.S. Department of Defense picks another base for F-35 training.

El Mirage officials are concerned the F-35 may be louder than the F-16, and they want noise tests conducted as part of the F-35 site selection process. Glendale officials worry that could hurt efforts to bring the F-35 to Luke.

The West Valley's economy has been hit by the down housing market and pullback in consumer spending. Metro Phoenix lost 28,900 construction jobs between November 2008 and November 2009, according to the Associated General Contractors, a construction industry group. That is the greatest loss of construction jobs in any city.

Nationally, 23 percent of construction workers are unemployed, according to December figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Martin

"Any additional work will help our industry, which is in a depression right now. At 23 percent unemployment from November '08 to November '09, the Phoenix metro area continues to lead the pack nationwide in construction unemployment," said David Martin, Arizona president of AGC. "I hear stories almost every day, how contractors have to make the tough decision to let folks go because of the lack of work available. All projects, regardless of size, will contribute to helping our industry out of the doldrums."

Don Rinehart, president and CEO of the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, also welcomes any potential work or new jobs that could result from the federal government selecting Luke as an F-35 training hub.

"Luke contracts with a lot of Arizona companies for services and construction projects. Any improvements they do would be a help to the economy," Rinehart said.

The Glendale base has received some contract work via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, including \$10 million worth of contracts awarded for infrastructure and other work. The Pentagon could decide as early as this spring where its F-35 training operations will be located.

Luke spokesman Justin Oakes said any upgrades would be determined after the Air Force picks F-35 sites.



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