



WESTMARC
2017



RISING FORCE

WESTMARC and economic developers hope new data attracts employers who want to utilize the West Valley's skilled workforce

By ERIN THORBURN

If the West Valley could speak for itself, it would confidently articulate that in addition to comprising 15 unique communities with more than 50,000 businesses, it also houses a population of 1.5 million people. With equal tenacity, the West Valley would share about “her” ever-growing robust workforce that includes Banner Health, Luke Air Force Base, Amazon.com, American Express, APS (Palo Verde) and many more competitive top-target industry employers. It would tell you all this and more, with pride and assurance, laced with the best kind of humility of a thing that knows its worth without reducing or downplaying others.

Although the West Valley isn't a person with an audible voice, companies near and far, local economic development officials and loyal residents gladly serve as the voice with a mission of growing an exceedingly competitive entity. One of the West Valley's most avid supporters and interpreters, WESTMARC, is joining forces with some of the Valley's most prominent decision makers, educators and analysts to develop and showcase a workforce that's skilled, strong and unstoppable in attracting new businesses near and far.

About WESTMARC

WESTMARC, a public/private partnership of 15 communities, the business and education sectors, provides opportunities for members to interact and communicate on issues vital to moving the West Valley forward. WESTMARC is committed to its members' success and its mission of enhancing economic development and quality of life in the West Valley.

WESTMARC communities

Avondale	Phoenix
Buckeye	Sun City
El Mirage	Sun City West
Gila Bend	Surprise
Glendale	Tolleson
Goodyear	Wickenburg
Litchfield Park	Youngtown
Peoria	



LEADING THE WAY:

Sintra Hoffman, president and CEO of WESTMARC, was one of Az Business magazine's Most Influential Women in Arizona Business in 2016. Her professional background includes more than 19 years of experience in local, state and federal government.

PHOTO BY MIKE MERTES, AZ BIG MEDIA



Brian Friedman



Dave McAlindin



Scott Whyte

West Valley employee statistics are finally hitting home

Did you know that 37-percent of healthcare employees reside within the West Valley? In fact, it's Maricopa County's leading industry. Why, then, are only 21 percent of healthcare jobs actually located in the West Valley? If that raises an eyebrow, this will lift the other: 34 percent of finance and insurance workers in Maricopa County live in the West Valley, yet only 12 percent of the jobs are located there.

If both brows are raised, and you've added a head scratch, you're experiencing a reaction similar to that of economic developers and leaders in the West Valley. Intermingled with confusion has been an element of frustration among Maricopa County's key players, whose responsibility it is to attract new businesses.

The frustration, until recently, has derived from the way data has been collected in workforce reporting. Prior to recent initiatives, analytic information was historically recorded based on place of employment, rather than residency.

"This issue of details involving employment occupation information rather than residence put the West Valley as a whole at a great disadvantage," explains Scott Whyte, Peoria's economic development director.

Why?

"Companies look at workforce availability first and foremost. How many skilled and talented individuals required by a company are available – not just bodies, but skilled workers? Not having accurate data puts us in a position of hardship," Whyte says.

Thanks to the efforts of Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), Dr. Shade Shuttters, EMSI and additional West Valley partnerships, inaccurate reporting is hopefully an issue of the

BY THE NUMBERS

34% Percentage of finance and insurance workers in Maricopa County who live in the West Valley, yet only 12% of the jobs are located there.

1.6 million Number of people who live in the West Valley.

69% Percentage of the West Valley workforce that commutes outside of the region to work in other parts of Maricopa County.

40% Percentage of Phoenix residents who live west of I-17. Phoenix has a population of 1.5 million.

28% Percentage of manufacturing workers in Maricopa County who live in the West Valley, yet only 16% of the jobs are located there.

\$62,775 Average annual income for households in the West Valley.

37% Percentage of healthcare workers in Maricopa County who live in the West Valley, yet only 21% of the jobs are located there.

62% Percentage of the West Valley population that is workforce age.

past. How will this impact the West Valley's employment reporting and efforts to attract new business?

"We can statistically show proof of having a skilled workforce," says Buckeye Interim Economic Development Director Dave McAlindin, "rather than simply saying it."

McAlindin adds, "In the past, the only way we could prove our workforce migration, was to tell prospective company decision makers to get up in the morning,

watch the news and observe the traffic headed east on the I-10."

According to WESTMARC's President and CEO Sintra Hoffman, the improved methods of data sourcing aren't simply correcting a significant discrepancy in workforce statistics, they are soliciting much more granular occupational data.

"With our partnership with MAG and the work of Dr. Shuttters this year, we have been able to look more deeply into specific occupations and learn more



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about the 69 percent of West Valley resident commuters traveling east,” Hoffman says. “This targeted data is a significantly improved way of messaging the West Valley to companies.”

Sarah Murley, of Applied Economics, will add to the refinement and eventual execution of the new West Valley workforce data, says Glendale Economic Director Brian Friedman.

“Sara is analyzing the data and coalescing all the information to be easily read and digested,” he says.

Same players, but a new and better game

In reality, the heavy hitters of a skilled workforce have been in the West Valley for some time now. The assumption or perception that it hasn't is something for which the current three-phase WESTMARC workforce study has labeled as “grossly outdated.”

The emergence of accurate reporting, however, has and will continue to enable invaluable players to rise from bench to limelight. How will this change the desirability of the West Valley in the eyes of businesses seeking a new location? The short answer: business will boom.

Turn your attention to Glendale as a perfect example. With a current population of 250,000 and a workforce of 120,000, Glendale is expected to rise to 350,000 residents by 2040 with 200,000 jobs.

“Driving the entire Valley of The Sun, Glendale has about 32 million square

TOP EMPLOYERS

Here are the West Valley's top employers in the industries targeted for growth by WESTMARC:

Banner Health 6,683	FedEx 1,308
Luke Air Force Base 5,072	Shamrock Foods 1,204
amazon.com 4,538	JBS Packerland 1,200
American Express 3,240	Arizona State University 1,187
APS/Palo Verde 2,624	HonorHealth 1,145
PetSmart 2,061	JPMorgan Chase 945
Abrazo Healthcare 1,726	Grand Canyon University 903
Swift Transportation 1,324	Humana 940

feet in total space — office, retail and industrial — and now we're in a place where we're welcoming more jobs than people,” Friedman says.

Further west, Buckeye is experiencing an explosion in population, with 654 housing permits – a 46 percent increase over last year — with an anticipated 2,000 permits projected for 2017, making it the No. 1 population-based rising West Valley city.

Great news indeed. The West Valley steadily fills homes, has attractive space for a number of desirable industries and plenty to attract new businesses, but let's revisit how this plays into the workforce.

The proverbial players in the limelight are a multifaceted workforce highly skilled in healthcare, transportation, distribution, business service and manufacturing.

If you'd like another analogy, think about whales and barnacles. They have a perfect symbiotic relationship. If you're thinking the barnacles represent the West Valley workforce, think again. The West Valley workforce is a beautiful Orca who just made her most impressive “sky hop” and she's about to be covered in barnacles.

As new businesses continue to realize the breadth of an existing and ever-growing skilled workforce through improved and substantial data sourcing, with any luck I-10 East will look much less like an ant parade during the 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. commute.

Who is in the limelight?

As Hoffman previously stated, the improved employment data analytics

FUTURE WORKFORCE

West Valley cities' employment estimates for 2050:

Glendale **206,900** // Buckeye **143,600** // Surprise **120,300** // Peoria **118,000** // Goodyear **104,600**

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aren't simply illuminating more accurate numbers, they're shedding light on who comprises the West Valley's skilled workforce.

"We know through MAG mapping and the site selection community that we have a strong skilled FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) workforce," Friedman says.

Beyond the West Valley's robust workforce, composed of skills in advanced business services, healthcare, STEM professions, advanced manufacturing, IT and aerospace, there is another invaluable demographic from which to acquire skilled workers.

"Every year, an estimated 400 Luke Air Force veterans separate from the military," Hoffman explains. "This means we have highly skilled people available in this region now. This gives the West Valley a paramount opportunity to acquire highly skilled individuals to make an existing impressive workforce even more formidable."

Of course, WESTMARC's relationships with educational entities like West-Mec, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, Maricopa Community Colleges and more are also producing educated, skilled and available qualifiers to fill the existing needs of targeted top industry employers, all of whom are lucrative to the continued prosperity of the West Valley's economic development upturn.

We've built the workforce, now ... will they come?

If the data provided by the collaborative efforts of MAG, EMSI, Dr. Shade Shutters and Sarah Murley prove true, we can expect business to grow exponentially over the next decade and beyond. A new means of collecting data is the No. 1 source of gratitude. Finally, the West Valley's workforce is being recognized for what it is: a powerhouse.

"Together," Friedman says, "Our cities in the West Valley collectively house 1.6 million people strong. We are definitely a force to be reckoned with and will only get stronger. All our economic directors are meeting now on a routine basis. United, we are encouraged, proud and pleased that the West Valley has matured and is in a good position to have a good future."

The West Valley may not have "her" own voice, but does she really need it? After all, she has the numbers, a soluble workforce and finally, a way to show it. **AB**

OCCUPATIONS OF WEST VALLEY RESIDENTS

Here is a breakdown of the occupations of West Valley residents in the industries targeted for growth by WESTMARC:

ADVANCED BUSINESS SERVICES

Computer systems analysts	4,020
Insurance sales agents	4,017
Loan officers	2,732
First-line supervisor administrative support	9,161
Accountants and auditors	5,112

HEALTHCARE

Registered nurses	12,471
Medical scientists	308
Medical transcriptionists	278
Medical assistants	4,189
Medical secretaries	3,865

STEM occupations

Engineering technicians	541
Drafters	959
Life scientists	742
Physical scientists	765
Computer occupations	21,442
Advanced manufacturing team assemblers	2,477
First-line supervisors of production	2,100
Machinists	1,452
Computer-controlled machine tool operators	381
Welders, cutters, solderers and brazers	1,328

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Electricians	3,243
Software developers, applications	3,516
Computer systems analysts	4,020
Software developers, systems software	2,282
Information security analysts	711

AEROSPACE

Electrical/electronic equipment assemblers	925
Industrial engineers	1,025
Aerospace engineers	232
Mechanical engineers	785
Avionics technicians	153

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Class act

West Valley educational partnerships grow to superhero proportions



By ERIN THORBURN

New, more accurate methods of data sourcing have revealed a stalwart West Valley workforce comprised of highly skilled professionals in healthcare, finance and insurance, manufacturing and much more. In tandem with a quantifiable means of relaying this information to prospective businesses, there's even more to the story. As the West Valley finally has a way to prove its value with a skilled workforce and attractive quality of life, education is making its mark – and it's brighter than a bat signal in the sky.

West Valley industries are lighting the beacon

Hopefully, you are familiar with the bat signal, most notably, from the late Adam West's pop-culture Batman series. Whenever someone was in need of superhero help, they summoned Gotham's cave-splunking hero by projecting the bat symbol into the sky.

West Valley businesses and employers may not have a tailor-made beacon to shine for all to see, but many have formed steadfast relationships with area education outlets, including ASU

BY THE NUMBERS

Here is the education attainment of
West Valley residents:

269,394

High school graduate or equal

335,508

Some college or associates degree

202,763

Bachelor's degree or higher



West, Grand Canyon University, Thunderbird School of Global Management, Trine University, Pierce University, Midwestern University, Communiversity at Surprise, West-MEC and Glendale, Glendale North and Estrella Mountain community colleges.

The partnerships that businesses and entities like WESTMARC have with surrounding colleges and universities have, in essence, become a beacon. When there is a need for skilled employees, industry leaders are now approaching West Valley schools for help.

"We don't start any new programs until an industry comes to us," says Diane McCarthy, West-MEC's director of government relations and business partnerships.

And they do.

"Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station came to us," McCarthy says. "They have all these skilled workers who are retiring and that workforce will need to be replenished, and not simply with nuclear experts, but with skilled carpenters, mechanics, instrumentation control operators and individuals capable of fulfilling specialized craft jobs."

To accommodate Palo Verde, West-MEC implemented a program that enables students to begin a program starting their junior year that allows them to experiment with a variety of trades. In their senior year, students can have dual enrollment on the same campus and finish high school with a number of stackable credentials. If they choose to stay on for a third year to acquire an associate's degree, they are all but ensured a position with Palo Verde.

So much is the demand for positions seeking experienced, educated and skilled HVAC, welding and manufacturing workers, that West-MEC has a 90 percent program completion rate and 97 percent graduation rate with a 100 percent job-placement assurance.

While the multiple West-MEC campuses in Surprise, Buckeye, Glendale and Deer Valley respond to the call for educated and skilled employees, Grand Canyon University has 11 advisory boards representing 200 mostly westside companies with whom they partner.

"With nearly 30,000 students studying in Arizona through our ground campus and online operations (another 50,000-plus study online throughout the world)," says GCU President Brian Mueller, "most of our graduates seek employment in Arizona and the West Valley specifically."

A 'WV' for all educational entities to see

Perhaps even more exciting than the partnerships higher education institutions have with local West Valley industries is the partnerships they have with one another.

"GPEC identified that the No. 1 barrier to new business acquisition in the West Valley is education," says Maricopa Community Colleges Chancellor Dr. Maria Harper-Marinick.

This is a two-pronged problem. First, when a new business formally surveys the educational opportunities in the West Valley, they want to make sure their children are going to get a good education before they decide to relocate their families. Second, business leaders want to know that there is education infrastructure in place to give them the skilled workforce they will need to effectively run and grow their business.

For example, according to Harper-Marinick, Maricopa County's workforce will need to capture 61 percent of skilled nurses to meet demand in the foreseeable future.

"It won't happen simply through ASU graduates," Harper-Marinick explains.

This is where CEP (current enrollment partnerships) are a payoff for the West Valley, and most likely for Arizona as a whole.

Thanks to Maricopa Community Colleges, ASU, NAU, GCU and other prominent higher education entities coming together, the numbers are changing.

"These partnerships will enable nursing students, as an example, to achieve a nursing license in three years," Harper-Marinick says. "One year of community college and two at a university."

Educational partnerships are effectively bridging the gap by utilizing initiatives like "reverse transfer."

“If a student has completed 60 out of 64 credits,” Harper-Marinick says, “and the remaining four is all that’s required to obtain an associate’s degree, a student can transfer credits back to a community college and take the equivalent ASU course to complete the necessary credits.”

Programs like these and others that encourage the continued enrollment of a 72 percent part-time student population are vital in the prosperity and elimination of negative stigmas of West Valley education.

As a result of West Valley focused educational partnerships, high-demand occupations and the fastest growing occupations are being tracked and accommodated.

Where and what is the skilled workforce demand?

“Welding, precision machining, aircraft mechanics, auto collision and repair are our Top 5 most in-demand vocations,” says McCarthy.

GCU, for its part, is the largest provider of teachers to West Valley K-12 schools, as well as the largest provider of nurses to West Valley hospitals and clinics, according to Mueller.

“Our business graduates are sought after for their entrepreneurial spirit,” adds Mueller. “Accountants, worship leaders and professionals in computer science and IT are very prevalent and we will have our first engineering graduates in about 12 months.”

ASU and University of Arizona graduates comprise a bulk of graduates in education, medical and business professions.

Collectively, these educated, highly skilled graduates — along with the educational institutions that mold them — aren’t simply altering the numbers, they’re changing the story; they are changing the West Valley.

So, new businesses, when you need it, your skilled workforce is ready and waiting, and you don’t even need to beam a “WV,” into the sky. WESTMARC and a host of economic development experts are ready to welcome you to your new home. **AB**



Maria Harper-Marinick



Diane McCarthy



Brian Mueller

HIGHER education

Here are some of the higher education facilities in the West Valley:

PUBLIC

ASU West Campus
Thunderbird School
NAU at Glendale
NAU at Estrella Mountain
NAU at North Valley

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Glendale Community College
Estrella Mountain Community College
Rio Salado Community College
Buckeye Education Center

PRIVATE

Arizona Automotive Institute
Arizona College
Grand Canyon University
DeVry University
Franklin Pierce University
Midwestern University
Ottawa University
Universal Technical Institute
ITT Technical
Huntington University

CTE/JTED

West-MEC: Central Campus, Northeast Campus, Southwest Campus, Northwest Campus, Diesel Campus, Start@WEST-MEC

COLLEGE GRADS

Here is the breakdown of the number of Arizona State University and University of Arizona graduates living in the West Valley:



Aerospace	225	Law	425
Agriculture	356	Mathematics	291
Art	1,373	Medical	8,547
Business	8,210	Multiple majors	1,153
Criminal justice	1,652	Political	1,044
Design/construction	917	Science	2,189
Education	10,319	Social	4,663
Engineering	2,148	Technology	1,800
Information	4,433	Tourism	382

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BUILDING A
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WORLD

**Improvements in quality of life make marketing
the West Valley easier for economic developers**



By ERIN THORBURN

“I see trees of green, red roses too, I see them bloom for me and you. And I think to myself what a wonderful world.” – Louis Armstrong

If you replace the red roses with cactus in the famous Louis Armstrong serenade, “What a Wonderful World,” you’ve captured the essence of the West Valley. Don’t be quick to chastise West Valley advocates for being overly sentimental. After all, thanks to a new method of collecting data, the West Valley assets have become more apparent than ever – from roses and cacti to an impressive skilled workforce, attractive housing options and enough retail offerings to make even a major metropolis blush. The quality of life in the West Valley has never looked better and champions of the West Valley challenge you not to sing her praises.

Becoming even more of a wonderful world west of the 17

Of 1.5 million Phoenicians, 40 percent reside west of the I-17. Why? Imagine a mash-up of all the diversity, culture and novelty of a city with the nuance, charm and intimacy that comes from a small town. You’ve just envisioned the West Valley, but don’t take my word for it.

“One area where the West Valley really shines,” says Brian Friedman, economic director for Glendale, “is that we have all the offerings of a cosmopolitan region, but there is something

different and something to be proud of in our communities and what they offer individually.”

In Glendale’s case, there is a lot to offer.

“Westgate alone boasts 21 restaurants,” Friedman explains. “We also have the sports arena, Cabela’s, Tanger Outlet (which just finished a third addition), American Furniture Warehouse, John Simon medical facility, Credit Union West with an impressive 80,000 square feet of space, Conair and more.”

The “more” according to Friedman, is approximately 2.8 million square feet of non-residential space.

“I remember when the arena was the only thing out there,” Friedman says, “and observing a sign stating ‘\$0.75 per square foot.’ Now, that same property is worth \$19.75 per square foot.”

Nearby, Peoria is drawing attention for the development of P83, a comprehensive entertainment district housing a sports complex, dining and shopping among its various offerings.

“We have received a proposal for a nine-acre development near the sports development along the Loop 101 and Peoria Avenue with Plaza Companies,” says Scott Whyte, Peoria’s economic development director.

New additions have also been added to West Valley sister cities: Goodyear’s Estrella Falls commercial area, Tolleson’s downtown redevelopment efforts and the expansive Skyline Regional Park in Buckeye, to name a few.



More than quality brick and mortar

The image and offerings of the West Valley extend beyond purely aesthetics and retail square footage.

“This summer, we’re kicking off a quality of life committee,” explains WESTMARC President and CEO Sintra Hoffman. “Years ago, we didn’t have executive housing or a vehicle for highlighting our impressive workforce. We have that now, in addition to 3,000 square miles of unique offerings.”

Hoffman brings to light the charm and culture of West Valley hot spots like Wickenburg, alongside cities such as Buckeye, that in addition to having an air of historical magnetism, also has the caliber of housing of which she refers.

Even beyond a well-stocked retail pool and housing, the West Valley has an incredible recreational portfolio that includes Skyline Regional Park, White Tank Mountain Regional Park, Estrella Mountain Regional Park and Lake Pleasant Regional Park, to name a few. All of which offer residents and visitors anything from hiking and biking to special family programming and several seasonal recreation options.

The West Valley also accommodates the desires of sports fans. Serving as a primary hub for the Cactus League, baseball enthusiasts can catch a spring training game at Goodyear Ballpark, Peoria Sports Complex, Camelback Ranch and Surprise Stadium. Of course, football fans are graced with Glendale’s sports arena should they want to catch a Cardinals game.

While the West Valley certainly boasts its share of impressive venues from sports and entertainment to outdoor recreation, there are equal, if not more intimate city-specific opportunities in which residents may partake. For example, it’s a little-known fact that the West Valley has a wide-range of health and wellness outlets and opportunities.

“We’re working on an eight-page brochure that visually highlights the specific offerings within the West Valley,” Hoffman says. “Including local yoga studios and classes, gyms, boot camps and wellness outlets.”

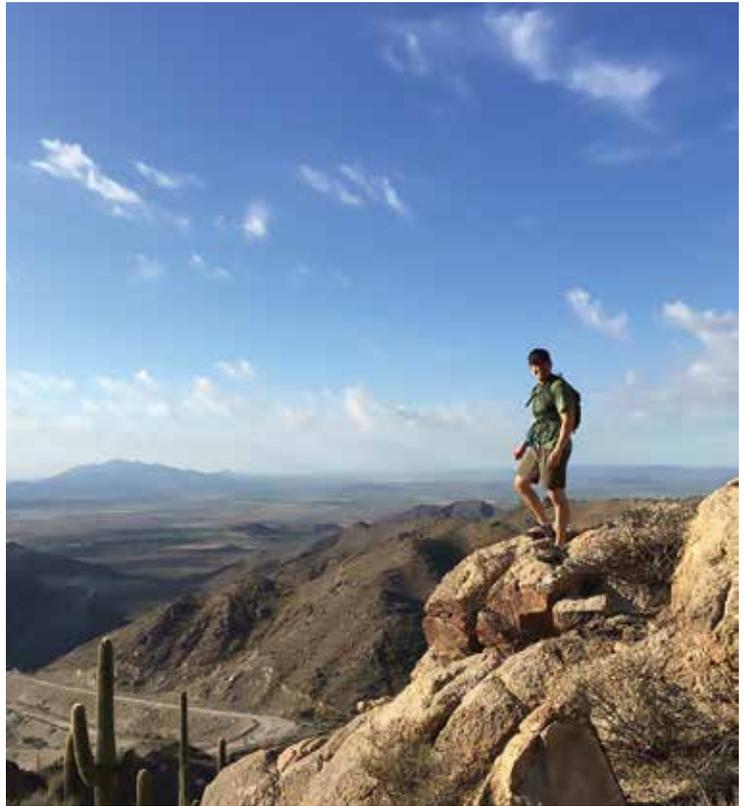
Quality and quantity, even more value added to quality of life

While the housing, amenities and recreational aspects of the West Valley are clearly bountiful, there are other factors that contribute to the wonder of West Valley life.

“I was actually raised in East Phoenix, but chose to move to the West Valley,” explains Goodyear Economic Director Michelle Lawrie, “because of it being known as a quality community that has a great reputation statewide.”

In fact, Lawrie’s home city, Goodyear, has been consistently recognized by national and state entities, as one of the best communities in which to live.

According to Lawrie, this has much to do with amenities



Brian Friedman



Sintra Hoffman



Michelle Lawrie



Scott Whyte

as it does to Goodyear’s low poverty rate, high average household income, positive employment growth and the fact that Goodyear is acknowledged as a safe place to live.

Many West Valley cities share these attributes and more. Educational offerings, for example, only further add to the quality of life and opportunity within the West Valley. Arizona State University has a West Campus, Northern Arizona University has several campuses and of course, there is a host of highly reputable community colleges, private colleges and career technical education facilities — from Estrella Community College to Grand Canyon University and West-Mec, as examples.

For those who live, work and play in the wonderful world of the West Valley, they stand behind its charm, value and culture, and so do those whose jobs it is to ensure the longevity and safe keeping of a cherished quality of life.

“Many of us have known each other for a long time,” explains Friedman. “We know what opportunities are available; we know what we have to offer. We also know that it’s rightfully and statistically the time for the West Valley to shine.” **AB**




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RISING FROM

**Commander steers Luke Air Force Base
as an economic engine and community leader**



THE WEST

By ERIN THORBURN

If you reside in the West Valley, you likely know that some of the nation's top pilots, crew chiefs and intelligence specialists — in addition to the F-35 training program — are all synonymous with Luke Air Force Base. What you may not be aware of is that Luke has a direct economic impact of \$653 million, an indirect value calculated at \$1.1 billion, and a total economic impact totaling \$2.17 billion in Arizona. While Luke's economic contributions are undoubtedly invaluable, the value added in perpetuating a healthy, skilled and impressive West Valley workforce is priceless.

"Luke has tremendous value as a workforce," says WESTMARC President and CEO Sintra Hoffman. "As a result of Luke expanding the F-35 program, there is a tremendous opportunity to maximize capital investment. It also allows us to build and tap into our pool of defense contractors and talent that comes out of that base."

According to Hoffman, Lockheed Martin, although downsizing in some areas, is growing operations on the base with 750 personnel working at Luke and continuing to grow.

"The relationship and benefits between the F-35 program and Lockheed Martin are exponential," says Glendale Economic Development Director Brian Friedman. "Luke is a \$2 billion industry that moves the state, not just the West Valley."

Indeed, but there's no denying the force of Luke's contribution in moving the West Valley workforce ahead. In addition to contractors, each year 400-plus members separate from Luke's military population. These individuals are highly skilled and prepared to meet the needs of a range of professional occupations.

"This talent pool is an asset to the West Valley in two ways," explains Hoffman. "Typically, they stay in this area once they separate and invest in homes as well as integrating into and adding value to the workforce."

With aerospace as one of the West Valley's target markets, this makes Luke personnel all the more coveted once they're ready to enter the workforce.

To get a closer look at the impact Luke AFB has on both the military and on the surrounding communities, Az Business sat down with Brig. Gen. Brook Leonard, who took command of the 56th Fighter Wing from outgoing commander Brig. Gen. Scott Pleus one year ago.

Az Business: What does it mean to you to return and lead Luke Air Force Base after completing the F-16 Qualification Course at Luke back in 1995 as a distinguished graduate?

Brook Leonard: It is an honor to return to the 56th Fighter Wing that in many ways formed the foundation of my family and flying career. In fact, over the July 4th weekend in 1994, I drove to Colorado Springs to get married to my bride of now almost 23 years. This was our first home together and we love being back.

On the professional side, for more than 75 years, the 56th Fighter Wing has been building the future of airpower. It is in our DNA. We build the future by fostering skills and habits into our students that graduate and quickly use those skills in combat and into our instructors who spread out across the Air Force and make it a better place to serve. So it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to serve and give back to the Wing that gave so much to me and my family.

LEADING THE WAY: Luke Air Force Base in Glendale held a change of command ceremony on July 13 as Brig. Gen. Brook Leonard took command of the 56th Fighter Wing at Luke Air Force Base in July 2016. Leonard is a command pilot with more than 2,900 flying hours, including 576 combat hours. Most recently, he served as senior military assistant to the secretary of the Air Force at the Pentagon.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LUKE AIR FORCE BASE



AB: How has Luke Air Force Base changed since you were first there more than 20 years ago?

BL: In many ways, the base has not changed and in others it has changed a lot. One thing that has only gotten better, and in fact is the best in country, is the relationship the community has with the military in general and specifically Luke Air Force Base. Only through teamwork and an incredibly strong relationship can you combine the world's largest fighter wing inside the fifth-largest metropolitan area in the country.

On the other hand, 20 years ago, Luke was an established and mature F-16 training base and now we are the largest F-35 base and on the leading edge in maintaining and operating the newest fighter in the Air Force inventory, the F-35A. We are still learning a lot and are not even halfway in our journey toward having six F-35A squadrons at Luke in the future. So we have a strong focus on daily operations, but also a campaign mindset with an eye on the future implications of each one of those decisions.

AB: What do you see as the strengths of Luke Air Force Base?

BL: The strengths of Luke Air Force Base are its incredible capability to develop airmen and train fighter pilots and its

action-based, difference-making community relationship. If you averaged out what we do in a year, you would see we fly more than 100 sorties (flights), teach more than 200 hours of academics and graduate four students every day. Over the last 76 years, Luke has mastered the training of pilots across numerous different types of aircraft. Most recently and ongoing is the F-16, and now we are doing that with the F-35A. Developing airmen and training fighter pilots is in our DNA, but we could not do any of that without the support from the community.

AB: How is F-35 training going so far at Luke?

BL: Currently, we produce more than 1,200 graduates a year from multiple specialties, including pilots, nurses, maintainers, air battle managers, lab technicians and intelligence officers, to name a few.

On the pilot and maintenance side, we are currently training personnel from many partner countries, including Singapore, Australia, Norway, Israel and Japan, in addition to U.S. personnel.

Every day for the next three to five years, you will see F-35A training increase dramatically as we build from 55 F-35As currently at Luke to 144. Otherwise, the other training that we do will stay the same, with the F-16 training slowly decreasing over that time, but not going away entirely.

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AB: President Trump said he plans to increase defense spending. How could that increase impact Luke Air Force Base and the surrounding areas?

BL: Increased defense spending would most likely be seen in terms of manpower, readiness and modernization. Additional manpower, is our most critical need to relieve the strain placed on our airmen after more than 26 years of being engaged in conflict across the globe. Even as we grow the F-35A mission at Luke, the manning and infrastructure that supports that mission's growth has not been commensurate. Hopefully, increased defense spending would go to improving the infrastructure that enables everything we do on base. Even without an increase in spending, Luke Air Force Base will continue to grow as we grow the F-35A mission.

AB: You're currently remodeling a building at Luke to become a veterans support center. Why is that important to those serving at Luke and what kind of impact do you hope the center makes in the communities surrounding Luke?

BL: Developing airmen is our top focus and the Veteran's Support Center is one of many initiatives under that focus. This center will not only support those who are no longer serving, but will also help those currently serving develop themselves for increased responsibility while on active duty, as well as higher potential if and when they are no longer on active duty. The center will support skills development, as well as professional planning programs. Overall, I see it as a commitment to continuously develop all our airmen — past and present.

AB: What is the biggest challenge you're facing now as the commander at Luke?

BL: Our biggest challenge is to say "no" to some good things in order to say "yes" to some great things. Every airman I have ever

met will expend every ounce of energy to get everything done. The important part is to get the most important things done, especially in a resource-constrained environment. To get there, we have three "shaping" objectives focused on developing leadership, communication and continuous process improvement. To get to great, we plan to empower and entrust everyone as a leader, let everyone know what we value and the direction we need to go and give them the tools to prioritize and make the right decisions.

AB: What are your primary goals as commander at Luke?

BL: Our vision is to lead the Air Force in developing airmen and training fighter pilots. To do that, we are focused on developing airmen and teams, increasing the quantity and quality of training and strengthening mission support processes and infrastructure.

We have 10 more specific objectives underneath those "lines of effort," with three of them that primarily describe "the how" and we call them our shaping objectives. The three "shaping" objectives are intentionally and consistently developing airmen as leaders, establish robust communication and strategic alignment, and create an integrated, wing-wide process improvement system.

Another, critical piece is our objective that focuses on community. We not only want to be in the community, we want to be a part of it. We focus on showing our community their Air Force and building a relationship of trust with them. One way we seek to demonstrate how much we value our relationship with our community is what we are calling our Luke Service Blitz. On June 16, the entire base spent the whole day in the community doing service projects and saying thank you for the outstanding support we receive every day. **AB**

Michael Gossie contributed to this report.

FACTS ABOUT THE GENERAL

- Brig. Gen. Brook J. Leonard is the commander of the 56th Fighter Wing at Luke Air Force Base.
- General Leonard entered the Air Force in May 1992 as a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy.
- He earned his pilot wings from Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, and completed the F-16 Initial Qualification Course at Luke Air Force Base in 1995 as a distinguished graduate.
- He has held a variety of flying assignments and leadership positions to include weapons officer, flight commander, and operations officer.
- He is a command pilot with more than 2,900 flight hours, including 576 combat hours.
- Luke Air Force Base is General Leonard's second tour as a wing commander, having previously commanded the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, from 2013 through 2015.



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