



Hangar approved, jobs coming

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The best news on the Clinton County job front since May 2008 was made official Tuesday — a new 100,000 square foot hangar will be built at the Wilmington Air Park, and is expected to create 259 jobs.

Joe Hete, the CEO of Air Transport Services Group (ATSG) — the parent company of Airborne Maintenance & Engineering Services (AMES) which will operate the new hangar — said construction could begin first quarter 2012, weather permitting. Construction is anticipated to take 12 months, with hopefully an aircraft in need of maintenance inside the facility immediately upon completion.

“Ramping up” operations may take six months after the facility is completed before all 259 jobs are filled, with some jobs being filled prior to the end of construction, Hete said.

The new jobs are projected to include 235 technician jobs and 24 administrative and support staff positions. Earlier this year, an AMES executive estimated the annual payroll for the new jobs would be about \$11.3 million.

Pay ranges are expected to be from, at the low end, probably \$11 or \$12 an hour for “unskilled” jobs, up to mid-\$20s an hour for skilled technician positions, Hete said Tuesday.

The long-awaited announcement was held at the air park and attended by Ohio Gov. John Kasich. Officials have said previously the project would enjoy a substantial boost from public subsidy, in particular from the state of Ohio.

Hete said the news Tuesday is the result of a “true example of the spirit of cooperation” between private and public entities.

“We’re just ecstatic to be here today. The project is a go,” Hete said.

Kasich emphasized the decisive role that a private enterprise — ATSG and its wholly owned subsidiary AMES — played in the process.

“This wouldn’t have happened without a great business and vision. These business leaders are the heroes today,” said Kasich.

The governor gave high praise as well to Clinton County’s State Rep. Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville). Rosenberger would “tackle” him whenever he saw him and remind him of the project, Kasich said.

Kasich, in his first year as governor, said he has had more “serious conversations about economic development” with Rosenberger, a first-year state legislator, than with anyone in the Ohio Legislature.

The governor twice in his speech at the air park said the 8,000-plus people who lost their jobs there were unemployed “through no fault of their own.”

“It’s just not justice,” the governor said.

He pledged his administration will continue to be vigilant and as “creative as our human minds can be” to figure out ways to bring jobs to the infrastructure-rich air park and the surrounding Clinton and Highland Counties area.

“We want you to know we’re starting to win,” said Kasich.

In one of several references in his talk to the Lord, the governor said, “Thank you Lord for giving us a break.”

Rosenberger said, “Together we’ve pushed and pulled [to make the hangar’s financing structure come together].”

State Sen. David Daniels said, “It’s great to see Airborne Maintenance & Engineering Services Inc. investing back into our region and community.”

Wilmington Mayor David Raizk said the world now knows “you can get a deal done in Ohio.”

Wilmington City Schools (WCS) Superintendent Ron Sexton was also provided an opportunity to speak at the occasion. The Clinton County Port Authority, which owns the air park, has said it will seek property tax exemptions and reductions. The local school district is the primary recipient of the funds generated by property tax.

Sexton spoke about the school district’s support for job creation.

At the most recent WCS Board of Education meeting on Saturday, Sexton said there had been no formal discussions between the district and the Port Authority on how to alleviate the impact on the schools if the Port is successful in its property tax strategy.

Legally, there is “not a whole lot” the schools can do to prevent the Port from pursuing its tax strategy, Sexton said Saturday in response to a media question, other than to “work closely” with the Port and try to show it how the reduced tax revenue would adversely affect the schools.

Near the end of the Tuesday event, Clinton County Port Authority Chairman John Limbert said he is hopeful within the next 60 to 90 days to have more good news about jobs.

The hangar already has a suggested name — the JUMP hangar, with JUMP standing for Joint Use Maintenance and Painting. The hangar would include painting facilities.

AMES is an aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul provider. It provides services in heavy maintenance, line maintenance, engineering and manufacturing, component repair and overhaul, and material sales.

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