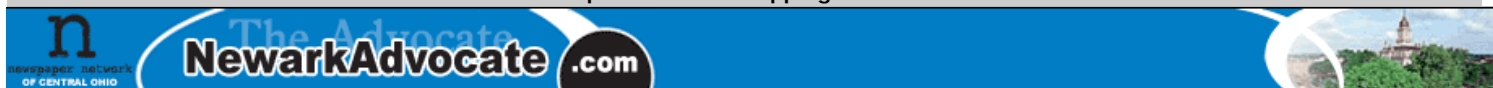


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Voinovich: Filling baby boomer work gap a challenge

By MARK SZAKONYI
Advocate Reporter

NEWARK -- The biggest challenge facing the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center, also known as The Base, is replacing its baby boomer work force, Sen. George Voinovich said Monday.

The former governor, who spent the morning touring Boeing and Bionetics, said companies across the state are facing, or are expected to face, the same challenge.

"The real test for Ohio is whether we can provide that work force now and in the future," Voinovich, R-Ohio, said.

He pointed to Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County, Ohio State University-Newark and the Central Ohio Technical College as key to making sure the next generation is trained to meet the demand.

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The institutions were able to help fill the jobs left vacant when some Boeing workers decided not to move when the division relocated from Texas to Heath in August, Voinovich said.

"Being here, the glass is half-full. We are on the right track," he said.

The county has the work force and programs available to train them when the gap left by departing baby boomers becomes apparent, said Windy Murphy, a job developer at Licking County Opportunity Links Center.

She said she expects the gap to become visible in the county within three to five years.

In the past year, local companies and the three educational institutions have come together to ensure students are learning the skills they need to be employed in the area, Murphy said.

"I think what sets us apart is that we have a skilled work force, and we are rural so we have a work ethic," she said.

Murphy said her organization's goal is to retrain people who were laid off and get them back to work and earning at least 90 percent of the wages of their previous job.

If funding is available, the job seeker's education at any of three local educational institutions is paid for, she said.

The visit was the fourth for Voinovich, who first tried to save The Base when it was announced the Air Force facility would be closed, said Rick Platt, executive director of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority.

Voinovich also was instrumental in attracting attention to The Base, which



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Morgan Wonorski, The Advocate

Sen. George Voinovich stresses the importance of a skilled job force that is available for companies at the Base Monday morning during a press conference at Boeing.

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helped it on its road to privatization in 1996, Platt said.

It was the Air Force's first privatization of facilities.

"I felt terrible that I wasn't able to make the big celebration on the 10th anniversary," Voinovich said. "This place, as far as I'm concerned, is like a member of my family."



He said that he would continue supporting the "gem" by requesting support of guidance navigation assistance repair programs in the 2008 Defense Budget.

"This is a strategic installation not only for the United States of America, but for NATO and all of our allies," Voinovich said.

The facility, which employs more than 900 people, hosts 20 employers, including Honeywell, BAE Systems and Raytheon.

Platt said the facility has an estimated \$200 million annual impact on the regional economy.

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