

8 | NEWS. SATURDAY, AUGUST 21, 2004

County prepares to take over NASA facility

By Frank George
Patterson Irrigator

Stanislaus County executives say the county should take control of the NASA Crows Landing Flight Facility within the next several months, and this time they say they mean it.

"We have gone through several giant steps," Stanislaus County Deputy Chief Executive Officer Richard Jantz said at a joint Newman City Council/Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors meeting Tuesday. "We have gone through the process and I am much more confident today than I was two years ago."

Located two miles south of Patterson between Marshall and Fink roads, the airfield has two concrete runways, a control tower, administrative offices, maintenance areas and fire/rescue facilities.

Jantz said during the meeting he plans to ask the board of supervisors to accept the title to the 1,528-acre airfield in late September. Water and soil cleanup from decades of military use have delayed the process of acquiring the base.

The U.S. Navy has expedited that ongoing task, Jantz said. Ongoing dialogue with the Federal Aviation Administration, the state regional water quality

board and the state departments of toxic substances and waste management is also necessary.

A Crows Landing flight center steering committee has met about 10 times with District 5 Supervisor Paul Caruso to talk about long-range plans for the air base, Jantz added.

He said the whole process has taken much longer than anticipated.

"But we are getting closer and we are very close," he said.

Jantz said the county has met all environmental requirements for acquiring the first toxic-free 1,050 acres, and it is very close to satisfying the legal requirements. The Navy will continue the cleanup, enabling the county to take over the rest of the facility some time in the future.

"We want to make sure we have in place the infrastructure and the market that will help this base be self-supporting and not requiring a public subsidy," Jantz said.

He said he foresees a general aviation airport attracting air cargo and corporate jets. Its proximity to Interstate 5 and Highway 99 could also attract big rig shipping interests and an industrial park, he said.

"Competition breeds competition," Jantz said, when asked



Hime Romero/Irrigator file photo

TOWERING ABOVE: The county is in the process of taking over some facilities at the NASA Flight Facility in Crows Landing, including this control tower.

about a potential struggle between the Crows Landing base and the Stockton Metropolitan Airport. "We're probably in a better position for corporate flight service and maybe in a better position for business park development."

Jantz said other San Joaquin Valley municipal airports have just one runway, but Crows Landing has two. He said there might still be competition, but that might instigate a higher demand for

aviation in Stanislaus County.

Not everyone seemed as satisfied with the project as Jantz, however. Leaders from several veterans groups asked him and the board why they were not included in the plans. The veterans said they are looking for places to house vets that need housing and hold their meetings.

However, Jantz said NASA is only handing over the two runways in September.

"To summarize, we do not believe there is property at the Crows Landing air base during this first round of transfer that would in any way meet the needs of the vets as expressed to me," Jantz said, later adding it would be tough to conduct meetings with jets taking off overhead.

Caruso said in December that he believed a veterans building near a city with water, electricity and sewage would be ideal place for the vets.

Veteran Richard Gayton of Newman said he and other veterans in attendance Tuesday want 25 acres somewhere on the Crows Landing base.

"We're the ones that gave you this opportunity," he said. "We're the ones that went off to war."

Jantz said the supervisors heard this request for property long ago, and the conclusion was that the base property would not meet the vets' needs.

"And they directed staff to work with vets organizations to help identify property in a developed area that would more likely meet your needs," Jantz said.

"And we're following up on that."

NASA Crows Landing Flight Facility was commissioned in May 1943 as Naval Auxiliary Landing Field, Crows Landing. The former NALF has served primarily as an auxiliary airfield for operations from Naval Air Station, Moffett Field.

NASA retained the airfield for use in July 1994. In October 1999, NASA was authorized by legislative act of the 106th Congress to transfer the base to Stanislaus County.

clubs.

Friends of the Library meet

Friends of the Patterson Library will meet at 1 p.m. Monday at 46 N. Salado Ave.

The group will meet for a work day to organize books for a book sale at the end of September.

Patterson residents who are interested in helping the group are welcome to attend.

For information: 892-8940.

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Transmittal

Date: 3 Sep 2004

From: Lynn Marie Homecker
Code 06CC.LMH

To: Diane Silva
Code ~~01LS.DS~~ 05G.DS
Administrative Record Manager

Subj: CERCLA ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD MATERIALS
NALF Crows Landing

Installation: NALF Crows Landing

UIC Number: N60211

- Document Title:

Author:

- Recipient:

Record Date:

Approximate Number of Pages:

Sites:

Key Words:

Contract:

CTO Number:

Newspaper article in the Patterson Migration
21 August 2004