

Kirtland Partnership Committee

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Editorial Page Editor

To Continue Its Work

The Kirtland Partnership Committee has set itself the task of building and maintaining communication and cooperation between the Kirtland Air Force Base complex and the surrounding civilian community. Born last year in the emergency of the recommendation that Kirtland be closed, the committee sees a continuing need for its base-championing function — and there was \$120,000 left over.

Certainly, such a link can help nurture cooperation and leverage the efforts of Kirtland and the community in achieving common objectives. And, controversies about activities and proposals for Kirtland and its tenants over the years suggest there is more to be done than just leading the cheers.

Sherman McCorkle, chairman of the Kirtland Partnership Committee, sees the first job as educating the community on the immensity and complexity of Kirtland in the Albuquerque economy.

McCorkle also sees the committee as having the mission of bringing Kirtland's concerns to the attention of the community. He mentioned the long-discussed road linking the Mesa del Sol tract, south of Kirtland, through the base eastward to a link with Interstate 40. Though the base has long

resisted, officials last year conceded that a road, generally following Tijeras Arroyo, was "worthy of study."

McCorkle said the committee would pinpoint information on how such a road might negatively impact Kirtland's mission and facilities — and be the base's advocate for those concerns in trying to influence the community's decision-making process.

That's an interesting thought. Strategic transportation infrastructure almost always has localized negative impacts, balanced by offsetting longer range benefits — witness the Montañño Bridge project. In contemplating the construction or alignment of a loop road through Kirtland, the broader interests of the community likely will be at odds with the concerns of Kirtland.

The committee could generate confusion about its exact role if it lobbies local government on behalf of Kirtland's viewpoint, in opposition to the broader needs of the community from which it springs. But, concern about such possibilities is premature now, except perhaps in the deliberations of the Kirtland group's executive committee.

The role of the business community advocating for its military base is a pattern repeated around the country, particularly in the military downsizing atmosphere of recent years. No military function goes begging for a home.

If one locality doesn't want some project, there usually is an alternative eager to accept it. And therein lies the seed of a problem worthy of Kirtland Partnership Committee attention: the proposal that Sandia National Laboratories' annular core reactor be modified for use in manufacturing Molybdenum-99 for medical use.

The anti-nuclear community — joined by SouthWest Organizing Project, an Albuquerque advocacy group for the poor and disadvantaged — actively opposes the plan. Opponents cite the radioactive waste to be generated — and assert the plan smacks of

a government subsidy for the pharmaceutical industry.

At the same time, the proposal is a new use for an old research reactor at Sandia — the crown jewel tenant of Kirtland. And, at least one other city is actively seeking it.

The Greater Idaho Falls (Idaho) Chamber of Commerce is spearheading a boosters campaign to sway U.S. Department of Energy officials to locate the Molybdenum-99 facility at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. The Molybdenum-99 facility, clearly, will not want for a home if opponents succeed in blocking it at Kirtland/Sandia.

One might expect that Albuquerque would be infertile ground for stirring up fear of the unknown hazards of nuclear energy. After all, Albuquerque has long been up to its armpits in the traffic and hazards of the nuclear age. The nuclear weapons at Kirtland come to mind. The first atomic bomb was designed and built north of here — and detonated south of here. The route between the two was through Albuquerque. Many of our friends, family members and neighbors work in or near nuclear activities without mishap or anxiety.

Though there hasn't been a particularly active sharing of information about what

was going on nearby, it is inescapable that Albuquerque area residents have been exposed to whatever hazard by proximity that people could face from such activities.

Yet, the anti-nuclear advocates have the louder voice in the Albuquerque community, and have for years. The brouhaha about a tank of waste water with a minuscule amount of radioactive contamination in it comes to mind.

If the business and community leaders in the Kirtland Partnership Committee could help Sandia scientists explain the true risks and rewards associated with the Molybdenum-99 project to groups and organizations in the city, they could be instrumental in building a consensus for keeping this important nuclear diversification here.

There is no doubting the sincerity or the energy of its opponents — and they are active in the public input portions of the decision-making process. Some of the same energy the other way could help even the odds — and if maintaining and expanding on the functions at Kirtland Base is the Partnership Committee's goal, this job looks tailor-made.

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Civilians Seek KAFB Growth

Save-the-Base Effort Spawns Committee

BY PHILL CASAUS
Journal Staff Writer

The civilian backers of Kirtland Air Force Base are no longer on the defensive, but they've got their dukes up just the same.

Sobered by a 1995 realignment proposal that would have brought Kirtland to its knees, a group of Albuquerque business and community leaders on Thursday formed a year-round committee that will make the retention and addition of base-related jobs

among its main priorities.

In other words, the Kirtland Partnership Committee plans to take the offensive.

KPC board chairman Sherman McCorkle said the group is working on two specific "situations" that, if successful, could produce 300 to 500 jobs at Kirtland.

McCorkle, like many committee members a veteran of the bruising fight that saved Kirtland from a massive realignment last year, wouldn't specify what kinds of jobs might be added, or where they would be coming from.

"If you talk about the situation, by the very nature of doing that ... it puts the effort in jeopardy," he said.

McCorkle emphasized that the committee

doesn't plan to "recruit" other Air Force missions to the base but to identify possible expansions to missions already here.

However, he also said Kirtland's grab-bag of missions, including research and training, can make it a magnet for other Air Force units.

"If you have an Air Force base where you simply fly airplanes, there aren't many opportunities to grow jobs," said McCorkle, a onetime Air Force airman who heads Technology Ventures Corporation in Albuquerque.

In trumpeting Kirtland's mix, committee members said they will have to blend education with cheerleading as they work with elected officials, Kirtland's brass and

everyday citizens.

"Part of this committee's job will be to make people know the charms, if you will, of Kirtland Air Force Base," said committee member Lee Zink, associate vice president for research/business and government relations at the University of New Mexico.

"What we have here is a group of people motivated to do the right things to ensure the stability and growth of Kirtland," added Gary Tonjes, president of Albuquerque Economic Development Inc.

Kirtland's variety and value apparently went unnoticed in the Pentagon in early 1995, when the base was recommended for realignment to the Defense Base Closure

and Realignment Commission.

Only a protracted fight, headed by the Kirtland Retention Task Force and New Mexico's congressional delegation, got the base taken off the list.

But even as the base was being

saved, task force members were talking out loud about making their mission permanent once the immediate threat was over.

"Business leaders in town got together and said, 'Hey, now that we're off the list and not impacted, we have to do something to assure that we maintain the liaison with Kirtland,'" KPC board vice chair-

man I.B. Hoover said.

"We could've been here today with glum faces, talking about the possible re-use of Kirtland," McCorkle acknowledged. "I think (what happened in 1995) sensitized people to the fact that we have a truly unusual, unique situation at what we call Kirtland. What we're saying is, let's take advantage of its unusu-

alness and grow Kirtland rather than assume it's going to be OK."

The Kirtland Partnership Committee includes many prominent business leaders and several former Air Force officers, including retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Leo Marquez, who headed the retention task force last year. Marquez will serve as the KPC executive director.

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