

F-35 will provide vital boost to local economy

By Jim Click Jr.

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

When the United States Air Force announced last October that Tucson International Airport was one of the top five locations under consideration for F-35 Lightning II training, it came as excellent news for our community.

The Air Force initially selected our great city for all it has to offer. In addition to year-round flying weather and Arizona's plentiful training ranges, Tucson residents are proud Americans who wish to continue their support for our troops, who deserve the best tools and equipment to carry out their important work defending our way of life.

In other parts of the state, communities surrounding Luke Air Force

Base and the Marine Corps Air Station Yuma are rallying in support of F-35 joint strike fighter missions. The Arizona Air National Guard's 162nd Fighter Wing, currently flying F-16 Fighting Falcons out of the airport, is under consideration for F-35 training independent from, and not in competition with, Luke and Yuma. We must join our neighbors to the north in a collective show of support for the F-35 in Arizona before the Air Force makes its final decision in early 2011.

In these difficult economic times we should secure the future of one of our city's largest income-generators by letting decision makers know that we welcome the F-35 with open arms. Your voice will give our city the backing it needs as we move to secure a prosperous future for Tuc-

son and our nation's defense.

As a member of the 162nd Fighter Wing Minuteman Committee, I invite you to join our public support campaign for the F-35. It's called Tucson Lightning and you can soon learn all about it at TucsonF35.com online. From this new site you can learn about the benefits the F-35 would bring to our city. You can also register your support on the site and be counted as someone who supports the city and our military.

The F-16s at Tucson International Airport won't last forever. As they age they are quickly being retired from the inventory. The F-35 will enable Tucson to continue its critical role in our nation's defense long after 2025, which is when the Air Force projects it will finally retire its F-16 fleet.

Collectively, Arizona's military facilities contribute \$9.1 billion annually to the state economy. The 162nd Fighter Wing alone brings \$280 million annually to the local economy and employs about 1,450 Tucsonans — more local workers than are employed by Home Depot stores, U.S. Customs and Border Protection or American Airlines.

The new mission will keep those jobs and defense dollars here for decades to come, flowing directly to the continued purchase of goods and services from private-sector companies throughout Tucson.

As an immediate benefit, Tucson's construction industry would receive a much-needed boost through an initial investment from the federal government of up to \$150 million in construction-related

projects at the airport.

Through an environmental-impact study, the Air Force will carefully examine all environmental issues related to the F-35 and will work to minimize or eliminate possible impacts of the F-35 on our community. During this process you will hear about upcoming public meetings and I encourage you to offer your support.

In the meantime, consider that the Arizona Air National Guard has safely flown six different single-seat, single-engine fighters from Tucson International Airport since 1956 with little to no impact on residents. This is a source of pride for the Guard and it's a tradition that it is prepared to continue.

E-mail Jim Click Jr. at jimclick@jimclick.com



Jim Click Jr. is a auto dealer and a member of the 162nd Fighter Wing Minuteman Committee.