

'We're far more than a landlord'

Neighboring Tinker business park multiplies base's economic welfare



Warren Thomas is the owner of the Tinker Business and Industrial Park on SE 29 in Midwest City. More than two dozen defense-related businesses have offices in the complex. [Photo by Jim Beckel, The Oklahoman]

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About 40 aviation companies clustered in a business park just north of Tinker Air Force Base hold \$2.8 billion in procurement contracts with the Tinker Air Logistics Center, federal Department of Defense and other government agencies.

The contractors include aerospace manufacturers Pratt & Whitney, G.E. Engines, Lockheed Martin and Spirit AeroSystems; General Atomics, manufacturer of unmanned systems; and smaller niche firms like Parsons Corporation, an environmental company that focuses on infrastructure, defense, cybersecurity and construction; the Choctaw Nation's Choctaw Defense, which provides operations services and more to bases worldwide; and Chloeta Fire wild land and prescribed fire consultancy.

"We're far more than a landlord; we use real estate for economic development and as a spawning ground for innovation and entrepreneurship for early stage companies," said Warren Thomas, who with Tulsa-based Flint Resources Co. owns the 70-acre Tinker Business & Industrial Park (TBIP) at 2701 Liberty Parkway just south of Interstate 40 and Sooner Road.

TBIP includes four buildings of 200,000 square feet of office space leased at \$11.75 per square feet. The first was built in 1989 with Boeing Corp. as the anchor and the largest tenant, until Boeing bought its own facility in the mid-2000s.

The annual salaries of the more than 400 individuals who work at the park today average more than \$80,000 — or twice what most state residents earn, Thomas said, noting the park's ability to keep professionals with science and mathematics careers in the state.

Park capacity allows for 1 million square feet, with 12 to 15 buildings. The streets, water, sewer and fiber optics infrastructure are ready to go. But Thomas said the park — which has weathered the 2008 economic downturn and three base realignments — doesn't subscribe to a “build-it-and-they-will-come” philosophy. Instead, it relies on solid demand.

Based on current trends and forecasts, TBIP, in 12 months to 18 months, should hit 50 tenants and 500 employees — plus a waiting list, Thomas said.

“America has regained confidence in the stability and growth of the military,” he said, predicting not only that existing tenants will expand, but also new tenants will come in.

TBIP Marketing Director Janelle Stafford said "there's insane networking among existing tenants."

The park hosts monthly tenant luncheons attended by top Tinker officers and U.S. legislators, Stafford said.

"Relationships develop and companies learn how they can help one another's businesses," she said.

Tracy Nicholson, director of the Air Force Sustainment Center Small Business Office at Tinker, said she works hand-in-hand with the TBIP — meeting contractors, not allowed on base, at their park.

Oklahoma small business contracts awarded by Tinker totaled \$146 million last year; \$384.6 million over the past three years, Nicholson said. Construction, health services and training make up the most contracts.

Nearly 33 percent of Tinker contracts were awarded to small businesses nationwide last year, Nicholson said.

"Small businesses are the backbone of the defense industry, and vital to sustaining our Air Force," she said.



Tracy Nicholson, director of the Air Force Sustainment Center Small Business Office at Tinker Air Force Base, said she works hand-in-hand with the Tinker Business and Industrial Park. [PHOTO PROVIDED]



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