

FEDERAL FACILITIES RESTORATION AND REUSE OFFICE

Award-Winning Advisory Board Drives the Redevelopment of Former Air Station into Community Asset Cecil Field Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, FL



Construction of new hangar at the former Cecil Field NAS facility
Inset: New sign at Cecil Commerce Center

Since World War II, the Cecil Field Naval Air Station has been a hub of activity for US Naval operations. With active and dedicated support from the local community, the air station underwent extensive environmental evaluation and expedited transfer for private use. Today, Cecil Field supports hundreds of jobs in the industrial manufacturing and commercial shipping sectors.



Located in the northeastern corner of Florida in Duval and Clay Counties, the Cecil Field Naval Air Station (Cecil Field) was one of the largest military bases in the area covering approximately 22,000 acres. Cecil Field was established in 1941, soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, as a location for replacement pilot combat training. Cecil Field operated until 1999 when, as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program, the air station was decommissioned. Cecil Field is now the site of a major commercial center and the Jacksonville campus of the Florida Community College.

The Cecil Field installation was commissioned as a naval auxiliary air station in 1943 and became the principal war-at-sea and dive-bombing training center for the Navy. In the 1950s, Cecil

New sign for the Jacksonville Airport Authority

Field was repositioned as an operating base for fleet aircraft units, and was one of only four bases in the country specifically used for operation of jet aircraft. The primary function of the base was to provide facilities, services, and material support for the operation and maintenance of naval weapons, aircraft, and other units of the operating forces. By the time Cecil Field was decommissioned in 1999, the base consisted of over 17,000 acres of contiguous property, and an additional 15,000 acres of noncontiguous property used for bombing ranges and an outlying landing field. Maintenance activities over the years generated a variety of waste materials including municipal solid waste, municipal wastewater treatment plant sludge, waste fuels and waste oils, chlorinated solvents, paints and spilled fuels, and waste pesticides.

Environmental studies were conducted at Cecil Field between 1983 and 1985 as part of the Department of Defense Installation Restoration Program (IRP), which seeks to identify, investigate, and clean up contamination from hazardous materials at military installations. These IRP investigations initially identified 18 waste disposal areas located throughout the base as containing hazardous substances. These areas included landfills, lagoons, and waste piles that received spent solvents, paint wastes, and wastes containing chromium and lead. The various contaminants were found in on-site soils, creek sediments and surface water, and ground water.

Due to the findings of the initial environmental studies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added the site to the



Air sparging system for groundwater treatment

National Priorities List (NPL) in 1989 for further environmental investigation. A Federal Facility Agreement (FFA) was signed by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), EPA and the Navy on October 23, 1990. A FFA creates relationships between national, regional and local agencies to expedite and effectively restore the site for private or public use. By 1994, the air station was slated for closure by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. A BRAC Cleanup Team (BCT), consisting of representatives from EPA, the state of Florida, the Navy, and contractors, was convened to guide the cleanup process and to act as a liaison with the community. On September 30, 1999 the base was officially closed to undergo cleanup.

In order to give the local community a voice in cleanup and reuse activities and keep them up to date with the project, the Cecil Field Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) was created in 1994 with the announcement that Cecil Field would be closing. The Cecil Field RAB consisted of 25 members of the local community. They produced a newsletter and, for over 8 years, held monthly meetings that were open to the public. Members of the Cecil Field RAB voluntarily participated in a workshop on consensus building and dedicated a half-hour of each meeting to education in environmental topics. In April 1996, the Cecil Field RAB was awarded a Citation for Meritorious Achievement by the Department of Defense for their dedication to the cleanup of Cecil Field and the smooth transition of property to reuse. Meetings between the Cecil Field RAB and government



Sign for the new Embraer Air facility



Cecil Field NAS BRAC Cleanup Team

agencies helped develop a strong relationship that enabled the Cecil Field RAB to participate in the Fast Track Cleanup Program. As a result, NAS Cecil Field was presented with the "Secretary of Defense Environmental Cleanup Award for Installation Restoration." Due to the progress made in the cleanup and reuse at Cecil Field, the Cecil Field RAB no longer meets on a regular basis.

An Environmental Baseline Survey, which identifies parcels of land for sale, lease or needing further investigation, was completed in November 1994. Some portions of the Cecil Field property were immediately ready for transfer to the private sector for reuse. This led to the creation of the Cecil Field Development Commission whose task it was to create a reuse plan for the air station. The Commission was soon succeeded by the Jacksonville Economic Development Commission (JEDC), which is made up of business leaders from the Jacksonville area and is still active today. In 1996, the JEDC submitted a reuse plan to the Jacksonville City Council which approved the reuse plan. By 1999 a full business plan was in place for the air station, including a fast-tracked turnover of the airport to the Jacksonville Airport Authority.

In 2003, with concurrence from the Navy, EPA deleted over 16,000 acres from the NPL listing

because they were determined to not pose any risk to human health or the environment. This cleared the way for the delisted property to be transferred for private use. Subsequently, 15,000 acres were given to NAS Jacksonville, another naval air station in Jacksonville; 8,000 acres to the JEDC; and 2,670 acres to Clay County and Jacksonville Parks and Recreation Department. Some areas of the base continue to undergo cleanup, including long-term monitoring of creek sediments and surface water, natural attenuation, soil excavation with off-site disposal and air sparging of groundwater.

As a former military base, Cecil Field has a strong infrastructure to offer potential tenants. It is proximal to I-10, a CSX rail corridor, and has runways on the property. The property is now home to the Cecil Commerce Center, a new development zoned for light and heavy industry, as well as commercial, recreational and aviation use. To spur progress at Cecil Field, the Florida Department of Transportation invested \$180 million in roads and infrastructure at the base.

Currently, 20 tenants are leasing 26 buildings on the property and employing over 1,400 people. Large corporations like Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and Bridgestone/Firestone, have seized upon the opportunities available at Cecil Commerce Center and have opened production facilities. Boeing is using its space at



Construction at Cecil Commerce Center

Cecil Commerce Center for the final assembly of the C-27J Spartan cargo plane for the military. Flightstar Aircraft Services Inc., signed an aircraft maintenance contract with FedEx Corp in May 2008, bringing more business to the revived air base.

Educational, community, and political leaders gathered in May 2006 to break ground for the first permanent buildings of Florida Community College Jacksonville (FCCJ), a 130-acre campus at Cecil Center. The Cecil Center Campus takes advantage of its proximity to the airport and offers programs for air traffic control, aviation maintenance, truck driving and college preparatory programs. Since the Navy left in 1999, the City of Jacksonville has spent roughly

\$200 million on redevelopment in the area. This funding has led to the development of many new neighborhoods and shopping centers in the area.

In addition, 1,358 acres at the Cecil Commerce Center are designated as a natural and recreational corridor and will be managed by state and local agencies. With the Department of the Interior's approval, this area is being master planned to include passive forms of recreation such as hiking and horseback riding trails, camping, hunting and fishing. The area is a small portion of a larger natural wildlife preservation corridor connecting Jennings State Forest, in Clay County with Cary State Forest, north of Cecil Commerce Center.

For more information, call or write:

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EPA-505-F-09-002 August 2009