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Springfield takes center stage with aerospace events this week

Air Mobility Center, industry forum focused on electric aircraft.



Credit: Bill Lackey

Owen Flannery, an employee with the city of Springfield, cleans the electric vertical take off and landing aircraft (eVTOL) that

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The local officials involved in the opening of the National Advanced Air Mobility Center of Excellence and in a two-day aerospace industry event here this week are quick to note the many partnerships that helped get Springfield to this point.

Still, Springfield will attract state, national and potentially even worldwide attention as a result.

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Years ago, it sounded more like science fiction: precision drone flights and automated package delivery, then flying cars that today are called electric vertical takeoff and landing vehicles (eVTOLs), and other aerospace work to create the jobs of the future.

Local, state and national partners will gather at a ribbon-cutting event Monday afternoon for the ceremonial opening of the National Advanced Air Mobility Center of Excellence, which will support the growing field of eVTOLs and other vehicles used in the Advanced Air Mobility industry.

“The opening ... is an important next step for Ohio and for the Springfield area as we seek to grow this next generation Jetson’s-like opportunity,” said Mike McDorman, president and CEO of the Greater Springfield Partnership. “This new statewide asset will help drive new aerospace jobs opportunities right here in Springfield, Ohio.”

The center — being called NAAMCE (which rhymes with Nancy) — is next to the terminal at

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Credit: Bill Lackey

The aircraft hangar in the new National Advanced Air Mobility Center of Excellence at Springfield-Beckley Municipal Airport Thursday, Sept. 14, 2023. BILL LACKEY/STAFF

The building ceremony is just one part of this week's events.

The second annual National Advanced Air Mobility Industry Forum will be Monday and Tuesday. The event will include flight demonstrations and static displays that will begin at 12:30 p.m. Monday, followed by the ribbon-cutting ceremony for NAAMCE at 2 p.m.

The show's second day will feature industry panel discussions at Clark State College's Hollenbeck Bailey Creative Arts and Conference Center in downtown Springfield.

The Dayton Development Coalition is hosting the industry forum in collaboration with the city of Springfield, JobsOhio, Clark State College and the Ohio Department of Transportation.

The list of planned speakers for the NAAMCE ribbon-cutting includes representatives from ODOT, the Federal Aviation Administration, JobsOhio, the DDC, plus Springfield and Clark County.



Tom Franzen, Springfield’s director of economic development and assistant city manager, talked about the many partners involved in the projects, including Gov. Mike DeWine’s office.

“We are happy to be supporting this,” he said. “It really cannot happen without the support of so many others.”

McDorman agreed with Franzen about the collaboration needed on a project this size.

“Springfield is on quite a roll right now, and we know that does not happen without strong partnerships and collaboration,” McDorman said. “We are witnessing unprecedented job growth, a housing explosion, and a downtown renaissance during this important run as a community. We are also experiencing a huge uptick in how people view our community and all the great things happening here.”

Past builds the future

Franzen said he hasn’t had much time to reflect on the progress made but said key decisions in 2014 and 2015 helped propel Springfield here.

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City and statewide groups were looking for air space to test drones and autonomous air vehicles and to give Ohio a foothold on future jobs.

“We’ve been working on this really for almost a decade,” Franzen said. “It is exciting to look back and see how those decisions .. are paying off to be able to take advantage of these opportunities now.”

Advanced Air Mobility supporters say it will change the way people travel and how goods are transported.

NAAMCE has secured commitments from Joby Aviation and Beta Technologies to use simulation technology, and in July, South Korean eVTOL developer Plana also said it would lease space in the center.

Franzen said, “In its purest form, it is a facility that will support the collaboration for the development of this Advanced Air Mobility technology ... It will be a place where researchers, industry, academia and the public can work together to help solve the problems and the challenges that will emerge as we develop this technology.”



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The center is a \$9.35 million project that includes a \$6 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Defense, \$2.9 million grant from JobsOhio and \$450,000 commitment from the city of Springfield.

The center’s initial mission is to support the Air Force Research Laboratory, based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Franzen said.

“That is the reason we received the \$6 million in grants,” he said.

Franzen said opportunities will follow the aerospace research work, from manufacturing to support services.

A year ago, local officials cited a study from Fly Ohio that said the state can expect more than \$13 billion in economic activity in 25 years from autonomous aircraft. The study projected up to 15,000 new jobs and \$2.5 billion in local, state and federal tax revenues through 2045 for Ohio.

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Credit: Bill Lackey

The new National Advanced Air Mobility Center of Excellence at Springfield-Beckley Municipal Airport on Thursday, Sept. 14, 2023. BILL LACKEY/STAFF

Center of attention

Franzen said many groups have come to Springfield for a tour of NAAMCE as it was being built and to see the collaboration happening here.

He rattled off tours for a veritable alphabet soup of organizations, including “the FAA, NASA, DoD,” plus state and federal lawmakers and agencies, technology companies and people representing education and workforce development.

“We are doing a tremendous amount of hosting a tremendous amount of people with interest,” Franzen said, maybe five to six such tours a month. “A STEM school out of Chicago brought about 12 students here this summer.”

“It is really an exciting time,” he said, emphasizing the city is playing a small role in the overall process.



Franzen was part of a delegation that attended the Paris Air Show in June and said it was exciting that some attendees there knew of Springfield.

“When you have representatives in Paris with worldwide companies, and they say they are aware of what you are doing in Springfield,” he said, noting the Air Force’s Agility Prime project. “It’s that activity that has put this on the radar of the companies developing this technology throughout the world. That’s amazing.”

The AFRL oversees Agility Prime, which seeks to spark eVTOL aircraft for the military, NASA and the FAA.

Testing the future

Despite the ribbon-cutting event, the NAAMCE building is still being finished, and full occupancy will not come until October, Franzen said.

“We will be flying the plane while it is still being built,” he said.

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Companies will test systems such as radar and sensors that will help eVTOLs fly, will refine package delivery via drones and will get technology to the market quickly and safely, he said.

“The building is necessary, but really it is the entire ecosystem we are building in Ohio to support the development of Advanced Air Mobility,” Franzen said.

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About the Author



Ben McLaughlin



Ben McLaughlin is editor of the Springfield News-Sun and has been a journalist for more than three decades, including more than two decades with the Dayton Daily News, Springfield News-Sun and Journal-News.



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