

Aerospace firms seek more work

BY L.A. LOREK

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With the military retiring old airplanes, companies in San Antonio's aerospace maintenance repair and overhaul business want to diversify.

At the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce's Aerospace luncheon Tuesday, speakers from Boeing, StandardAero and Lockheed Martin's Kelly Aviation Center talked about the need to get more commercial work and the importance of training San Antonio's young workers to take the place of a skilled, but aging aerospace work force. They all work with the Alamo Area Aerospace Academy and local colleges and institutions to train new aerospace workers.

The aerospace industry has an economic impact of \$4 billion annually in San Antonio, and \$1.99 billion of that comes from the maintenance, repair and overhaul business, said James E.

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Perschbach, partner with Bracewell & Giuliani, which sponsored the event.

"This is an extremely important industry to San Antonio," he said.

Port San Antonio, the former Kelly AFB, is the hub of the industry and that's where Boeing celebrated its 10-year anniversary last year. Lockheed Martin and StandardAero also recently celebrated their 10-year milestones.

Boeing is the anchor tenant at Port San Antonio. Its workers perform maintenance, modifications, inspections and other work on C-17 and C-130 cargo planes and KC-135 and KC-10 refueling tankers. To diversify more into the commercial market, Boeing is gearing up to work on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner airplane next year, said Michael W. Wright, Boeing's KC-10 program manager.

"Boeing has about 1,700 employees and that's up 200 employees since January of this year. We plan on hiring more," Wright said.

Some of the challenges Boeing faces in the aerospace industry locally include the tightening Department

of Defense budget and maintaining a trained and stable work force, Wright said.

Kelly Aviation Center has 550 employees at the Port of San Antonio, said Mark L. Crowell, program director at the center.

"We're a center of excellence for jet maintenance, repair and overhaul and new jet engine production," he said. The center is Lockheed Martin's only maintenance, repair and overhaul facility and it worked on more than 300 engines last year, he said.

"As the military landscape changes, we're looking to grow more into the commercial environment," Crowell said.

StandardAero has 1,100 employees in Texas and 550 of them work at Port San Antonio, said Dan Gonzales, its vice president of business development. It is the only depot to work on T56 engines for the U.S. Air Force, Gonzales said. That engine powers the C-130 Hercules, P-3 Orion and C-2 Greyhound aircraft. StandardAero has invested about \$20 million refurbishing Building 360 at Port San Antonio.

StandardAero currently runs one shift in San Antonio, Gonzales said. But it has the capacity to do 20 percent to 25 percent more work in the case of a surge in demand, he said.