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NIMAC sees positive future for air base

GUEST EDITORIAL

BY JOHN A. COOPER SR. Chairman, Niagara Military Affairs Council (NIMAC)

Each year, the Niagara Military Affairs Council (NIMAC) takes time to report to the community, sharing updates and expressing gratitude for the continued support from local municipalities and residents. This year, NIMAC is pleased to announce that the future of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS) looks bright, thanks to the collaborative efforts of our organization, the military personnel stationed here, and our community partners.

Since the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process began in 1995, NIMAC has tirelessly advocated for the modernization and retention of NFARS. We have faced many challenges, but with each hurdle, NIMAC and the local community have risen to the occasion, ensuring the base's growth and relevance. Over the past few years, the base has seen substantial transformation, especially with the successful conversions of the 914th and 107th Airlift Wings into new missions.

The 914th Airlift Wing has transitioned into the 914th Air Refueling Wing (ARW), taking on the vital task of mid-air refueling with the KC-135 Stratotanker. This return to the familiar skies of Niagara marked a significant achievement. For decades, our community grew accustomed to the low-flying patterns of the C-130 Hercules, so seeing the KC-135s return felt like welcoming back an old friend. The professionalism and adaptability of the airmen and women of the 914th ARW have been truly commendable as they continue to excel in their mission.

The 107th Airlift Wing has also undergone a significant change, converting into the 107th Attack Wing (ATKW) with a cutting-edge, high-tech mission. From Niagara, these skilled airmen now remotely pilot aircraft around the world. Their expertise and dedication have been crucial in executing this complex mission, and their successful adaptation to this new role has brought both pride and excitement to our community.

These changes have not only



Pictured is a scene from the August NFARS Civic Leader Tour, where base members were visited by Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh and Niagara County Manager Richard Updegrave.

reinforced NFARS' strategic importance, but also brought significant federal investment into the base. In recent years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been directed toward mission-driven improvements at NFARS, and the work is far from over. Last year, Congress allocated design funds for a new \$50 million operations facility, creating greater efficiency. This year's defense budget includes design funds for a \$65 million upgrade to the taxiway and runway, which will extend the runway by over 1,000 feet, further enhancing the base's refueling capabilities. Additionally, much-needed upgrades to the 107th Attack Wing's headquarters are already underway.

These investments are not only vital for the base's operational success but also have a ripple effect through the local economy. NFARS, with its 3,000 employees, remains the largest employer in Niagara County, contribut-

ing a staggering \$300 million annually to the local economy. The ongoing improvements and expansions mean increased opportunities for local contractors, businesses and workers, all of which benefit from the federal dollars spent here.

However, success should never lead to complacency. While NIMAC is proud of the progress made at NFARS, we recognize that continued advocacy is essential. As the base moves forward with new missions and growth, it is critical that we remain vigilant, ensuring the base's long-term success and viability. NIMAC will persist in advocating for NFARS at all levels of government, pushing for the additional upgrades necessary to support the future expansion of both the 914th ARW and 107th ATKW. Our work is far from done, and we are fully committed to ensuring that NFARS remains a vital part of the Air Force's strategic operations.

None of this is possible without the steadfast support of our community. NIMAC deeply appreciates the contributions of local municipalities and residents, as well as the crucial support from our federal delegation, particularly Sen. Schumer and Sen. Gillibrand, who have been instrumental in securing funding for these essential improvements. Their advocacy on behalf of NFARS has been invaluable.

As we look toward the future, NIMAC remains optimistic. We will continue to work tirelessly as advocates for NFARS, ensuring that it remains a critical asset for both the Air Force and our local community. To everyone who has supported our efforts, we extend our deepest gratitude. Your contributions are vital to the success of the base and, together, we are ensuring a prosperous future for NFARS and the men and women who serve here.

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