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BUSINESS

Norwegians explore relationship between base, communities



TORIN HALSEY/TIMES RECORD NEWS Jon Larvick, left, president of the Sheppard Military Affairs Committee, Tom Myrvold, mayor of Orland, Norway, Kevin Pearson, senior vice president for economic development and Tim Ingle, Wichita Falls mayor pro tem, visit during a meeting Friday at the Wichita Falls Country Club. A delegation from Norway wanted to learn more about the relationship between Wichita Falls at Sheppard Air Force Base. Orland Main Air Station will be the home of the F-35 fighter aircraft for the Royal Norwegian Air Force.



TORIN HALSEY/TIMES RECORD NEWS Rikke Maske, communications advisor for Orland, Norway, talks with Wichita Falls City Manager Darron Leiker, during meeting Friday with a delegation from Orland. The group discussed the favorable relationship between Sheppard Air Force Base and Wichita Falls.

By *John Ingle* of the Times Record News

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A delegation from Orland, Norway, visited several location in the United States recently to learn more about how communities and military bases function together and coexist.

Tom Myrvold, mayor of Orland and a graduate of the 80th Flying Training Wing's Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program, said Orland Air Force Base was selected by the Royal Norwegian Air Force to host the NATO nation's fleet of 52 Lockheed Martin-

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TORIN HALSEY/TIMES RECORD NEWS Orland, Norway Mayor Tom Myrvold, right, talks with Jon Larvick, president of the Sheppard Military Affairs Committee during a meeting Friday at the Wichita Falls Country Club. Representatives from Norway came to town to learn more about the relationship between Sheppard Air Force Base and the community of Wichita Falls. Orland is the location of an air station of the Royal Norwegian Air Force which is a member of the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program at SAFB.

local military bases to promote growth.

The group was in Wichita Falls Friday to meet with representatives from the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce & Industry, the Sheppard Military Affairs Committee, the city of Wichita Falls and an ENJJPT country sponsor. They also visited Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix, Arizona, as well as the Lockheed Martin plant in Fort Worth.

"I'm very impressed by the patriotism you have here in the U.S. That pretty much helps," Myrvold said. "But I also think there are, even though Phoenix and a city like Dallas have some common challenges as we have, you have to pay attention to the military. You can never take it for granted that you have a military base in your community, otherwise you can lose it."

Arne Solli, business development manager for Orland, said the general business climate in Norway has been down recently and, much like people in Texas, depends on a booming oil economy. But, the country is starting to feel the pinch of low oil prices.

But, he said, Orland is somewhat isolated because of the presence of the air force base.

"In Orland, in particular, because of this huge investment in the military, it's almost like a boom town, I would say. We're doing really well," he said. "There's a lot of business and a lot of development going on right now in connection with the building, the construction of the base. But, of course, that's short term. That's only going to last, what, five years maybe?"

Solli said the base was built in the early 1940s by the German military during World War II and was decommissioned shortly after the war ended. It was reopened in the 1950s to serve as a NATO base. The new construction and expansion of the base will double its footprint in the area.

The business developer said the economy of Orland is fairly diverse, but like Wichita Falls, the air force base is the largest employer with about 2,000 people working at the installation.

During an informal luncheon, the delegation shared the purpose of their visit, and leaders from different sectors shared what their role is in the

relationship between Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls and other communities. The Norwegian delegation then visited their countrymen stationed at Sheppard.



About John Ingle

Business/metro editor John Ingle covers the business scene in Wichita Falls as well as state and national politics. He is also editor of the newspaper's quarterly magazine Velocity: North Texas Business Journal.

[@inglejohn1973](#)

john.ingle@timesrecordnew...

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