

**OUR OPINION**

## Newark base evidence of hard work paying off

**F**ew among us believed the Pentagon's 1993 announcement of plans to close the Newark Air Force Base would — after much pain — turn into a blessing for so many in our community.

The base employed 1,500 people and pumped \$200 million a year into the local economy. A straight closure of the base created realistic predictions of doom and gloom at a time when the economy was still gaining its footing from the early '90s recession.

Thanks to the hard work of countless people across Licking County,

that did not happen. In fact, the site now holds promise for new jobs on newly acquired land and could play a vital role in the area's future.

Instead of closing, the Pentagon eventually agreed to privatize the base at its

**Today's topic**  
Licking Countians  
finally reap benefits  
after fighting for  
Newark Air Force  
Base.

existing site, the first time such a feat had been attempted.

Not only did local leaders need to win over Pentagon brass, but they also had to convince prospective contractors to take over government work at the Heath base even if it was cheaper to do so in their existing facilities elsewhere.

Well, as our two-day series made clear this week, our community overcame this challenge.

Ten years later, the Central Ohio Aerospace and Technology Center is home to two Fortune 100 companies and six of the top 20 defense contractors. That places the base in the top five largest concentrations of the aerospace and defense industry in Ohio.

In all, 975 people work there and the center and its employees pay more than \$1 million in taxes each year.

Yes, the economic impact may not come close to what it was 10 year ago. And we don't mean to discount the pain suffered by those who lost their jobs and were forced to move elsewhere.

But "the base" remains a critical engine for our local economy offering high-paying jobs instead of shuttered windows and sprouting weeds. That's the definition of success.