

A community of support

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ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. --

Around the clock, more than 4,000 Airmen from the 28th Bomb Wing provide airpower. In order for generations of Airmen to serve at Ellsworth AFB, there needs to be a supportive community behind them.

The South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority, created by the state legislature in 2009, collaborates with municipal governments, business leaders and base officials on projects mutually beneficial to Ellsworth AFB and the local community. The organization focuses on providing resources for Ellsworth Airmen and ensuring the base continues to be a viable center of national defense and regional economic benefit for the future.

Scott Landguth, SDEDA executive director, along with civic and community leaders from across the state, understand the importance Ellsworth has on South Dakota's success.

“One of the lessons we learned in 2005 is that the asset we have with Ellsworth in our state is something we always have to be working on,” Landguth said.

One collaborative project between SDEDA and the base was the creation of a \$27 million wastewater treatment plant to service both the base and the city of Box Elder.

The wastewater treatment plant was the most cost-effective approach to meeting the base and Box Elder's sewage treatment needs.

"The cooperation [the base] has with the state of South Dakota ... goes all the way back to when the runway was first built here and the Army Air Corps was stationed here," said Kevin Goyer, 28th Civil Engineer Squadron water quality program engineer.

According to Goyer, building the plant helped the neighboring community of Box Elder, Goyer said. He went on to add that the new plant ensures Box Elder's continued growth.

While community collaboration can mutually benefit those on the ground, the base needs advocates for the skies above to accomplish their mission. The B-1 is no small or quiet aircraft, so the base works closely with organizations such as SDEDA to ensure a safe training airspace for those living and working in and around Ellsworth.

SDEDA facilitated the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program since 2009. This Department of Defense-funded initiative ensures the base has ample airspace to train. SDEDA worked with farmers, ranchers

and community leaders to ensure training for B-1 pilots and combat systems officers.

The success of REPI relies on collaboration and communication with local partners to purchase properties within Ellsworth airspace that could inhibit certain travel routes. Organizations that partner with Ellsworth have had success with the REPI program, including the purchase of several large easements in Meade County.

These partnerships are critical to the base's success.

“There are some things the Air Force is not allowed to do by law, nor do we have the personnel to do it,” said Linda Fry, community planner for the 28th CES.

Fry explained by keeping the land surrounding the installation compatible with Air Force guidelines, Ellsworth remains a thriving base and a significant economic benefit for the region.

Due to the partnership between Ellsworth and SDEDA, the land surrounding the base is now 99 percent compatible with Air Force guidelines.

In addition to working with the local community on airspace projects, SDEDA also advocates for programs that benefit Ellsworth Airmen.

With facilitation from SDEDA in 2011, the base was also able to work with the community to donate land in exchange for a new elementary school and a

mixed-use compatible development area, making the REPI efforts in the Rapid City area beneficial for the Air Force and the region.

These partnerships improve base and local community infrastructure and preserve existing lands and agricultural assets.

Today, SDEDA and other advocates of the base ensure operational readiness by working toward an airspace free from encroachment. This large and diverse terrain makes for an ideal training ground.

Most recently, SDEDA partnered with the Rapid City Public Library earlier this year to extend city library services to base personnel. This collaboration allows the Rapid City community to invest in Team Ellsworth, while providing the Airmen and their families a way to conveniently experience city services.

“This grant will allow Airmen and their families access to a resource that will allow them to continue to pursue educational opportunities,” Landguth said.

These programs engage Airmen of all ranks and help them invest in the community. Airmen can take advantage of opportunities the community affords to service members and how the area supports the base.

Advocating for the third-largest employer in the state of South Dakota is no easy task. According to Landguth, since SDEDA’s creation, the base is in a stronger position to remain a viable military installation for decades to come.