AEROSPACE AND AVIATION SEEK TO TAKE OFF IN MENTOR

News / Events / Festivals

Ohio's **Aerospace** Industry was the topic of a recent event in **Mentor** that was geared toward fostering growth both locally and across the state.

As part of the City of Mentor International Trade Initiative's quarterly symposium series, about 75 people gathered Oct. 1 at Noah's Event Center for Aerospace Industry Opportunities & Updates.

Hosted by a partnership between the city and the Ohio Aerospace Institute, a nonprofit advocate of aerospace research and technology development, leaders in the industry both local and global gave presentations designed to build networks, create connections and advance the state of the industry in Northeast Ohio.

"Aerospace is such a growing sector in the national economy, and internationally," said Ronald M. Traub, director of economic and community development for Mentor. "It's great to have experts of this caliber to speak to Mentor area businesses, and it's value-added for our local business to take advantage of their expertise."

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One of the experts on hand, state Representative Rick Perales, R-Beavercreek, was enthusiastic in his commitment to advancing aerospace in Ohio.

“My strength, my forte, my sweet spot has been aerospace,” Perales said of his background, having served in the U.S. Air Force and as commander of the 788th Civil Engineer Squadron at Wright Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton. “I’m here for a specific reason: getting the state more involved (in aerospace).”

As a junior representative in 2012, Perales saw a need to bring together the state’s industries, universities and government to help advance aerospace, and formed the Ohio Aerospace and Aviation Committee. Comprised of three Democrats, three Republicans and 15 civilians from military, industry and academia, the committee works to identify problems and solve them.

One of those problems, Perales noted, was branding — Ohio didn’t have a strong identity for its aerospace industry, something the committee worked to correct.

“This is the Midwest, we don’t beat our chests about it, we just go out and do it,” Perales said of the region’s persona.

The symposium’s keynote speaker was Dr. Janet Kavandi, deputy director of the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland.

It’s a position she’s held since February. Before taking on the role, Kavandi was a patent chemist-turned-astronaut, a veteran of three space flights as a mission specialist who’s logged over 33 days in space with 535 Earth orbits.

Prior to her presentation, Kavandi spoke to The News-Herald about the Glenn Research Center’s commitment to supporting aerospace and aviation industries. At that particular research center, one of 10 NASA facilities around the country, the focus is on aircraft engines, space power and communications primarily. Work on sensor equipment there, for example, played a part in the recent announcement of NASA’s discovery of water on Mars — something “not incredibly surprising” to scientists like Kavandi, but still “really exciting.”

She also touched on her time in space, and the change in perspective that astronauts often experience.

“I appreciate a lot of the impact of humanity on the earth,” Kavandi said, “because you can see it. Things like pollution and deforestation.”

During her presentation, she also noted the incredible views from space, like looking down on Africa and seeing a lightning storm travel hundreds of miles across the relatively dark continent. She was also able to confidently answer a question about the validity of building permanent settlements on places like the moon, or Mars.

“Technically, we can do it right now,” she said. “We could have done it 20 or 30 years ago. We have the technology, it just depends how many politicians get behind it.”

Earlier presentations from industry leaders like Boeing, Parker Hannifin, McDonald Hopkins and several people from the OAI covered a broad range of topics for small businesses in the aerospace industry, from securing funding, to forming strong partnerships with larger establishment firms and potential legal hurdles and challenges businesses might face.

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“There is no industry in the world in which there is more of a leader than aerospace that the U.S.,” said Michael Heil, president and CEO of OAI. “It all started right here in the state of Ohio with two brothers — Wilbur and Orville Wright. Ohio is not just No. 1 in aerospace, we’re No. 1 by a long way.”

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