

Pesque Isle Residents Overcome Removal of Air Force Base

By JOHN F. O'BRIEN
United Press International
Presque Isle, Maine (UPI)—The hardy folk in this center of Maine's potato empire are striving mightily to prove that loss of a big military base should not plunge a community into economic despair.

City leaders know they have a big job on their hands, but they're going all out to solve their own problem and show other American communities how it's done. And they have a lot on their side.

With sudden deactivation of the U. S. Air Force base here

and a growing slump in the vital Aroostook county potato market, Presque Isle citizens last year faced a bleak future.

Vanished Payroll

The departure of 1,250 military personnel and loss of 250 civilian jobs at the base meant a vanished payroll of \$2.5 million a year in a city of just under 13,000 population.

The economy impact was felt at once in Main street cash registers when the Snark missile base closed down because of the weapon's obsolescence. Only two months

before the "phase out" order came, Air Force officials were trying to find 200 additional housing units in the city. Today, there are 300 surplus rentals standing vacant.

Unlike some communities losing military installations, Presque Isle citizens put up no howl to Washington. Instead, in characteristic fashion, they figured things could improve with some real individual effort.

The Presque Isle industrial council soon was established as an official arm of the city government. James M. Keefe, former chamber of commerce official here and in Attleboro, Mass., took over as director. A former Colby college and semi-pro baseball pitcher, Keefe threw some fast curves at the menace of depression. And he had the whole town on his team.

Knew Tactical Value

Echoing the pride and the self-sufficient attitude of Presque Isle people, Keefe said: "We didn't try to fight closing of the base because we

believe the federal government should not waste defense funds just to satisfy local demands. We knew the tactical value of the base had ceased to exist and we wanted to solve our own problems with initiative in using what was at hand."

The council quickly realized it could obtain a ready-made industrial park at a bargain basement price.

After negotiation with the General Services Administration through Maine's congressional delegation, the city was able to purchase nearly 1,900 acres of land and 20 valuable buildings for only \$58,000. At the height of the Snark program, the Air Force valued the base at nearly \$19 million.

Core of Complex

The core of the industrial complex is formed by six giant missile storage hangars, each 440 feet long and each costing \$838,000 to build. Each building contains two two-ton overhead cranes and one of them has a 10-ton crane. All offer the necessary utilities for heavy industry, including

five separate heating and electrical units in case space should be divided among separate tenants.

In addition to the huge hangars, the city's tract includes a group of warehouses, former Air Force maintenance shops, offices and even a mammoth gymnasium.

Presque Isle's largest industry since the air base closed is the potato processing plant

of Potato Service Inc., which employs 300. The F. H. Vahling Co., situated 10 miles away at Easton, employs more than 200 in the packing of frozen potato products.

Local Criticism

Industrial developer Keefe says there is no serious public welfare problem on Presque Isle now because the recent opening of the two potato processing plants "tempered

the shock" of the closing of the air base.

There was some unorganized and unofficial local criticism of the government virtually giving away the base, but the \$56,000 price was based on an appraisal by the GSA. The federal agency took into consideration the geographical location nearly 400 miles north of Boston when it decided on the selling price.

Keefe says the "closest" prospect the industrial council now has for a permanent major industry is "one in the wood products field." But he declined to disclose the concern's identity because negotiations now are at the critical stage.

However, officials of the GSA just last week flew to Presque Isle for formal signing of the deed to the property, enabling the council to move into high gear in promoting its facilities. Until then, the council had control of the base only on a revocable permit.

So far, four business and industrial firms have leased space and the industrial council is busy answering queries from prospects all over the nation, with cooperation of Maine's department of economic development.

Council members also are looking to the European Common Market as a potential source of overseas air trade with Presque Isle as the American jumping off point, as it was for thousands of military aircraft during World War II.

Includes Runways

The city-owned land includes one 7,400-foot runway and another of 6,000 feet, making accommodations for all planes except the largest jet aircraft. The city is served by four engine planes of Northeast Airlines and the council is remodeling one building into a new passenger terminal.

Twenty months ago, a chartered airliner landed at Presque Isle and U. S. Sen. John F. Kennedy stepped out to make a brief campaign speech. Despite their individual political leanings, Presque Isle people haven't forgotten his plea for America to "get things moving again."

They're doing just that in Presque Isle today.

Otley Installed

VFW Commander

Frank L. Otley was installed commander of Crater Lake Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars when it and the auxiliary held an installation recently at 42 North Front st., Medford.

Other officers installed were Ray Lawless, senior vice commander; David Schultz, junior vice commander; Ira Canfield, chaplain; Louis Kula, quartermaster; Richard Schultz, post advocate; E. D. Smith, adjutant; Harold Sutherland, three year trustee; I. H. Watkins, officer of the day; and Ivan Lusk, patriotic instructor.

Installing officer was Past Commander Richard Schultz.

Among the visiting officers were Past Department Commander Harry Birch, of Steelhead post 6881, Past Department Commander Ted Hopkins, of Post 4116; Past Department Commander Ira Canfield, of Post 1833; Senior Commander of District 7, Fred Kerby; Commander of Steelhead Post 6881 Kenneth Clair; Senior Vice Commander of Steelhead post, Jobie Bryan; and Commander of Post 3423, Alvin Hazelrigg.

MEETING SCHEDULED

Portland-Medford-The 31st annual meeting of the Oregon-Washington-California Pear Bureau will be held at the Sheraton Hotel May 23-25.



P.O. Box 252

By NORMA CLARK



PRINTED MATTER TO JAPAN

It was suggested in this column last February that old greeting cards, calendars and wildlife stamps be sent to Mrs. Rose Lesser, P. O. Box Nakahara 5, Kawasaki, Japan.

This is what Mrs. Lesser does with them:

"We collect natural educational material," writes Mrs. Lesser. "To distribute to school children here on Saturdays and after school to help them in their language studies. Worthy magazines, illustrated papers, post cards, greeting cards, wildlife stamps and similar material greatly encourage the students and enrich their lessons."

"People have sent us fine colored slides of their cities, which we use to make slideshows, so that the students can learn more about other countries."

In 1955 Mrs. Lesser founded MORE JOY, an organization for the promotion of mutual understanding and fellowship of youth. The organization began to crystallize in Kyoto during the war years when the large house of Mrs. Lesser became a natural assembly place for the various Asian students concentrated in that city. At the end of the war, the activities were continued when she came to Kanto to take part in the educational program of one of the universities in the Tokyo area.

"During the terrible air raids of 1944 and 1945," Mrs. Lesser continues, "my students and I, rather than go in to the primitive air-raid shelters which often became self-dug graves, continued our lessons and indulged in the beauty of foreign languages and the great classics. Watching the alien bombers flying low over our heads, we dreamed of a time to come when we would help each other to understand and to love. We looked toward the day when we would develop an organization, with headquarters in Japan, where friends at home

and beyond could be rotated to share knowledge, experiences and friendship, to build up mutual understanding and to gain an insight into each other's needs."

"Although the MORE JOY center then planned and discussed in the face of death are not yet visible, the work is going on. The present MORE JOY center must be considered only an emergency center, for it is run at the price of giving up my own private residence. But I have never resented this fact, for the joy of seeing the faces of youth meeting me at the door, folks feeling at home at the center, is a dear reward."

"Actually there is little privacy. Guests who stay overnight, as they often do, must suffer the sound of a typewriter and the light from the adjacent room where work is going on until late at night. The tape recorder and record player are often used for language studies and must be a bore for those who have other work to do."

"In March 1960 we went on a MORE JOY mission to India, a month long tour of Indian schools to distribute 1700 friendship letters, which had been collected and translated by MORE JOY members. A gift was attached to each letter."

"While we were there, two of our children, who were appointed child ambassadors, presented Prime Minister Nehru with a gift of a transistor radio."

"When we returned to Japan in April with Prime Minister Nehru's return-gifts, a gypsy doll and an ivory box, our hearts were full of gratitude for the love that had greeted us everywhere."

For those who wish to send any material that can be used in the language classes at the MORE JOY center, Mr. Katsuhiko Ishige, assistant secretary, advises that the outside of the envelope or package be labeled "Printed Matter, Sea-mail Undeclared" to avoid the heavy custom taxes there.

(Republican)

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Medford Man Pleads Guilty in Court

Elmer Cecil Waldbeser, 61, of 302 North Barneburg rd., Medford, pleaded guilty in district court Friday to charges of petty larceny.

He was placed on probation and imposition of sentence was suspended for 18 months.

Waldbeser was accused of taking three electric trains from Montgomery Ward company in Medford.

Sunday, May 13

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