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March JPA Buzzing with Redevelopment Plans

New developments are taking place at the March Joint Powers Authority which hold the potential to provide thousands of jobs, medical services from pre-natal to hospice care, uplift veterans struggling to reintegrate into society and life-enhancing opportunities for residents of the Perris Valley and beyond.

New JPA director Danielle Wheeler, who in January took the reins of the agency charged with redeveloping portions of the former March Air Force Base—now March Air Reserve Base—said she's excited and optimistic that the region's economy is recovering after several sluggish years.

The future looks bright for residents living in communities like Perris adjacent to the historic military installation.

"It's great to see things moving ahead," Wheeler said. "We've got a variety of businesses and companies locating here and we're excited about the prospects they are bringing, and will bring, to this region. It's all about results and we hope to achieve significant ones in the coming years."

The March JPA is governed by the March Joint Powers Commission, which is comprised of elected officials from the four jurisdictions that border the former March Air Force Base. Those include Perris, Moreno Valley, Riverside and unincorporated Riverside County.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch currently serves as chairman of the commission. Busch is the senior member of the JPA, having been elected to office in 1999, and has served multiple terms as chairman.



New March Joint Powers Authority Director Danielle Wheeler stands in front of a map of the authority, which is charged with redeveloping the former March Air Force Base.

Wheeler detailed several reasons for optimism:

- The ground-breaking in November of the March Veterans Village complex, a JPA partnership on 7.75-acres of property the authority donated for use by the non-profit agencies U.S. vets and Coachella Valley Housing Coalition. The veterans' village will provide, housing, educational and job training for up to 400 men and women veterans and their families. The center replaces an existing dormitory and administrative office that is outdated (it houses only 119 men and no women veterans or their children) and inadequate. The first phase of the March Veterans Village is expected to open in late 2017 to 200 former servicemen and women. March Joint Powers Commissioners voted to donate \$10 million to the veterans' village.
- The March Life Care Campus sold its first parcel of land to Signature Behavioral Health Care, which will construct a 150-bed hospital to treat emotional and mental health challenges. The future hospital will offer residential and outpatient services and will employ 300 people when completed, likely by 2020. The March Life Care Campus encompasses 236-acres and at build-out will include medical office buildings, a retail village, skilled nursing facilities, a child care center, ambulatory care facilities, a continuing care community, assisted living residences, a research tower, wellness and healing gardens, restaurants, a spa and fitness center, a performance venue and hotel. Overall, March Life Care is projected to create 12,700 construction jobs, and 7,200 full-time health care related jobs.
- The initial steps have been taken to develop about 310-acres south of the March Field Air Museum and east and west of the reserve base's 13,300-foot long runway. Long-range plans call for industrial, logistics and aviation-related developments on the property. The developer, Hillwood, A Perot Company, is no stranger to converting former military bases into civilian economic hubs. The Texas-based Hillwood has revamped 750 acres of Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, Camp Ono in Mira Loma and Naval Air Station Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla. Hillwood was founded by Ross Perot Jr., son of billionaire business mogul and former presidential candidate Ross Perot. The future March JPA development is in the environmental impact report stage and could break ground in a year, bringing as many as 1,800 jobs at completion.
- Continuing expansion at the Meridian Business Park, 1,290-acres of prime real estate west of March. Development at the site halted for years during the long economic slowdown but has picked up recently. "We are very excited about the development going on there," Wheeler said. "There's large users, logistics and potentially e-commerce coming to Meridian." The recent occupants include the entire University of California payroll and benefits unit, a Kaiser Permanente medical office building and offices of Western Municipal Water District. A Veterans Plaza commercial center, featuring restaurants, a fuel station and hotel, is set for ground-breaking in the next one to two years.



March Joint Powers Authority Director Danielle Wheeler says she considers Perris Mayor and March JPC Chairman Daryl Busch a mentor and regularly seeks his advice on pending matters.

Although new to the job as director, Wheeler has worked for the Joint Powers Authority for 13 years. The authority was created in 1993 when March Air Force Base was realigned and downsized to a Reserve installation.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch has been a constant presence on the Joint Powers Commission and Wheeler says she looks up to him like a mentor. Busch currently serves as chairman of the commission and is the senior member of the JPA, having been elected to office in 1999. He has served multiple terms as chairman.

Busch said the JPA took on a challenging and complicated task when it was created to convert surplus portions of March—a historic base once home to B- 52 bombers carrying nuclear weapons—from military to civilian use.

That meant removing and rehabilitating areas contaminated by chemicals over decades of use, demolishing dilapidated buildings to make way for new construction and mitigating the effects of redevelopment on endangered species. Through it all, Busch said, the JPA's mission never wavered: "Jobs, jobs, jobs," he said. "Our objective is to create jobs. Our Number One priority is creating jobs, creating jobs for the whole region to give people a better opportunity at employment."

Some estimates peg at 32,000 the number of jobs created once the realignment of March becomes complete.

Wheeler said that Busch's experience has proven invaluable as she navigates through her first year as JPA director.

"He's personable, knowledgeable and well-respected," Wheeler said. "He knows the history of this area and he is skilled at working with people. I pick his brain all the time."

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