

Area grad serves on Atlantic 'truck stop'

If you ask a road-weary trucker to list the things he's thankful for, chances are his favorite truck stop will be at the top of that list.

It's a convenient place to stop for fuel, repairs or just a cup of coffee and a hot meal when on the road.

Ask the same question of globe-hopping military pilots making the long trek from the United States to Europe, and they'll probably mention a tiny volcano top in the middle of the Atlantic called Terceira.

It's a small island that's home to Lajes Field, where one local high school graduate makes sure surfers can count on a truck stop of their own.

Air Force Senior Airman Matthew O'Neal, a 1984 graduate of Clarenceville High School in Livonia, is one of the about 1,000 Air Force men and women living on Terceira Island, called

the "crossroads of the Atlantic" by those who work at Lajes.

The small Air Force base is essentially a floating truck stop, providing military aircraft a handy place to stop for fuel and repairs while journeying to Europe, the Middle East and other parts of the world. Lajes also services aircraft from other nations, including Belgium, Canada, Columbia, France, Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands.

"Lajes has a very unique mission," said O'Neal. "We're a refueling stop for military and sometimes civilian - flights across the Atlantic. Also, deploying forces headed to Southwest Asia often stop here to rest, both coming and going."

Supporting cast

The effort takes a supporting cast, including fuel specialists, air traffic controllers, weather

forecasters, aircraft mechanics and a host of others. But the people who work on the airfield couldn't do their jobs effectively - and in some cases not at all - without the "behind the scenes" support that makes a typical military installation work.

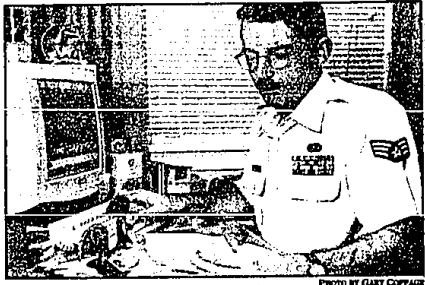
From doctors and lawyers to firefighters and police, everyone at Lajes comes together to keep the steady flow of aircraft moving in and out of the base. O'Neal is an evaluations manager with the base's military personnel department.

"My job is to process, review and update enlisted and officer performance reports," O'Neal said. "These reports are very important to Air Force people because they help us get promoted and give others an idea of how well we perform our duties. I also give guidance to supervisors to help them write and performance reports."

As one of nine small islands that make up the Azores, a province of Portugal, Terceira has only 250 miles of land surface, making the ocean visible from almost anywhere on the island. Mountains covered with subtropical vegetation provide a picturesque backdrop for the small towns and villages, which date back more than 600 years. Rows of quaint, shingle-roofed cottages line cobblestone streets, while farmers herd their cattle on endless pastures.

Only the sometimes turbulent weather disturbs an otherwise tranquil, old-fashioned way of life.

"Sometimes, it's tough being at a remote location," O'Neal said. "We are 600 miles away from the mainland of Europe. The island is roughly 14 miles by 24 miles - that's pretty small. There are no fast food restaurants, no shopping malls and only two



Local grad: Air Force Senior Airman Matthew O'Neal reviews an enlisted performance report. O'Neal is the enlisted and officer evaluations manager at Lajes Field, a remote Air Force base in the Atlantic Ocean.

nightclubs.

The weather is tough in the winter months because of the high winds and rain. But it's very nice in the summertime.

The locals hold bullfights and colorful street festivals. The people are very friendly, which makes it good to be here," he added.



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or, cities named in the suit were given a reprieve of a year to 14 months to show they are "voluntarily" taking action.

Now is the time to get involved in it, City attorney John Donohue said.

Under one scenario, Farmington Hills and Farmington would join with West Bloomfield, Commerce Township, Novi, Northville, Livonia and Redford Township in a Rouge River sub-watershed.

Together and separately, each community would develop action plans that stop illicit discharge (such as failing septic fields in Farmington Hills), manage storm water runoff and educate the public.

The proposed watershed consortium is not unlike ones the Hills and Farmington already link with, the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission for cable TV and Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County.

A subwatershed approach makes sense when it comes to costs, according to Kelly Cave of the Wayne County Department of the Environment.

"This is a way to control your own destiny, which is a good thing," Cave said to council members.

Farmington Hills has taken steps to control raw water, which includes having 1,600 detention facilities and open channels - as opposed to underground pipes - carrying runoff. The city has also dealt with

major flooding problems in Kendallwood, Pobble Creek and at the Red Roof Inn.

"We've taken care of the three big ones, but there are still residents threatened by flooding," Biasoli said.

More needs to be done, a county health official said.

During a 1994-95 water study, researchers found high levels of fecal coliform and E. coli bacteria in tributaries that flow through Farmington and Farmington Hills.

In some areas, there were 600 to 1,800 parts of E. coli per 100 milliliters or a "cup of water," said Bill Carlson of the Oakland County Environmental Health Department. A level above 130 is considered too high.

Failing septic systems are the main culprit, he said. Farmington Hills has 3,500 septic systems. "The systems are slowly leaking into the system," Carlson said. "It's subtle and not obvious."

The city will have to look at ways to pay for storm water and septic improvements.

The city of Farmington borrowed \$12 million from the state revolving fund to pay for the sewer separation project in 1990. Another likely source is the federal government, which has spent several billion dollars on wetway clean up.

"The job isn't going to be done until we're swimming in the Rouge River ... down by the Ford Rouge plant," said Donohue, Hills city attorney.

Lights from page A1

Gross, father of a high school football player, eagerly told Jim Myers, Farmington High principal and chairman of the committee that studied the lighting question.

However, the lights might not be ready for this fall. Trustee Cathleen Webb told Superintendent Bob Maxfield that "We need to make people aware the lights may not be up and running by fall."

Maxfield thought it would take three to four weeks to get a plan together. Money for the project must be part of the new budget, which will be presented in May.

"People have to recognize it will take a while" to plan and coordinate the project with engineers and architects and "to realize cost-effectiveness" by coordinating installation with other, older construction projects.

The \$750,000 project will also involve restrooms, fencing, parking lot lights and more, Maxfield said.

"First, it has to be done right from a safety and lighting standpoint, and second, we want to

bring all three high schools on-line simultaneously," he said.

The Hills ordinance governs lighting height, location, illumination area and brightness, said Millstone, who was one of just a handful at the meeting opposing the lights.

"We should be protected" from the increased noise, traffic and other off-shoots of night football games, said Millstone, whose backyard abuts the track and football field at North Farmington High School.

"We lost the battle last night, perhaps, but the war's not over yet. I intend to go on," he said, adding that he hoped Maxfield: "will allow me to be on the committee to build-in controls on the lighting, parking and events scheduling."

Maxfield seemed to anticipate opponents' reactions to the vote. After the meeting, Maxfield said: "We need to keep talking to these people. We need to be good neighbors. They need to know if they call about a problem, there's someone on the other end of the line."

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the board."

Katz, 29,290 Chelsea Crossing, Farmington Hills, is a mother to four children ages 6 months to 6 1/2 years. Her oldest attends Forest Elementary.

Katz, a University of Michigan arts education degree-holder

now working on a master's in middle school education at East-ern Michigan, said she and husband Steve, a computer engineer, "chose to live in Farmington Hills because we love the community and hope to enhance what we have."

"And we have a vested interest, with four children" either in or about to enter the community school system, she said.

The former operator of an in-home, state-licensed preschool day care center, Katz, 31, wants to decrease class sizes and increase students' science and mathematics achievement because those two fields "are the wave of the future."

Besides wanting to boost MEAP scores, she particularly wants to "close the gap" in math and science for middle-school girls and wants efforts against substance abuse improved.

Mahmood, 36,079 Congress Road, Farmington Hills, is a physician on the staff of Henry Ford Hospital. He said Tuesday he would comment about his candidacy at a later date.



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