

D. Paul Sommerville, Chairman

July 11, 2014

Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort – Welcome VMFA-451 Squadron

Good Afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here today. Thank you, Major General Hedlund, for inviting me to speak.

I am honored to be part of such an exciting day to welcome home an old partner and family member of the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. The VMFA-451 squadron was here from 1963 to 1997 when it was decommissioned. We were all sorry to see them go. Then, in 2010 the squadron was reactivated as VMFA-501 for F-35B training at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida; and, that training is now moving here to MCAS Beaufort. Soon all of the pilots, marines and their families will call the Lowcountry their home, and those of us who already call the Lowcountry our home, we could not be more thrilled. The transition for these men, women and families will not be easy, but it has been a long time coming. It is hard to believe construction of facilities for the new Joint Strike Fighters began in 2011 and there is still more construction to be done; but, just seeing what has been done so far and knowing these brave men and women will soon be here in Beaufort, is very exciting.

As I stand here looking out to all of you, I have to pinch myself because it is inspiring to know these men and women will soon be my new neighbors. Beaufort County is one of the State's fastest growing Counties, but despite that, Beaufort still has that small town feel. We look out for each other and want to make sure newcomers feel welcomed. As the Chairman of County Council, I want to let everyone know, the County is honored and blessed to have these families move here.

As some of you may know, I was born and raised in Beaufort County and since I was a young boy, the Military has had a huge presence here in the Lowcountry. These men and women have secured our freedom and enhanced our community with their presence and values. Marines and civilians aboard the Air Station have provided a billion dollars in economic activity and supported 4,200 jobs. These numbers are extraordinary. I cannot imagine what Beaufort County would be like without the economic engine the military provides.

Once again, I want to welcome an old partner into the new chapter that brings the Beaufort Community and the Air Station together. What does that mean? It means we have all made the cut! The Warlords are back! They are the fifth Generation Fighters flying the fifth Generation Aircraft that will help keep the world safe. They will help keep those young recruits training down the street at Parris Island safe when they go into harm's way. They will continue to make Beaufort a better place, and we are lucky to have them.

There will be growing pains for those moving here, but it really is a win-win situation for all involved. Who would not want to get orders to move to Beaufort, South Carolina? For those already here, I want to welcome you and for those coming in the next few months, safe travels and I look forward to you being part of the Beaufort County Family.