

Aerospace and Aviation Leaders Discuss Future Climate in San Diego

Industry experts highlight growth opportunities and challenges within the county

NATIONAL CITY, CA – Industry leaders discussed the future of aerospace and aviation industries, as well as opportunities and challenges they face in San Diego County at South County Economic Development Council's (SCEDC) Aerospace and Aviation Forum on Thursday, May 11.

The speakers discussed the future growth of the industry, vital roles data management will play as the industry continues to grow and innovative ways that drones are being integrated into unexpected activities, such as General Atomics recent support of California wildfires, where their infrared pods were used to provide on-the-ground intelligence for mapping the fire and directing in responders. To further advance this industry, Robert Walker, senior director marketing and proposals of General Atomics, shared "Open systems architecture is where it's at. It allows all vendors to create add-on products that increase a system's or device's flexibility and functionality, enabling the users to customize as needed."

Mike Grondalski, vice president of operations at UTC Aerospace Systems, discussed the importance of supplier diversity, "As markets are merging, suppliers are merging," said Grondalski. "They need help from us. We have manufacturing people who are skilled, so we do a lot of supplier development with emerging suppliers, because we aren't successful if they aren't successful."

Darryl Anunciado, owner of Action Drone, provided a drone demonstration and discussed the importance of managing the infrastructure of data collecting and noted, "Data is being collected to make things more productive via drones, but eventually there will be an abundance of data. This data will need to be interpreted and sorted and there will be a need for a data collection and interpretation workforce to do so."

Many of the panelists spoke to the challenges that come along with bringing on talent in San Diego, due to the high cost of living and high taxes. They discussed the challenges the companies face, potential solutions and different ways to build resilience – stressing the importance of working together, encouraging students to get involved at a younger age and collaborating with schools to grow a stronger, localized workforce. Janine Banuelos, human resources manager at Jabil, noted, "We've noticed a gap with the current workforce with technical skills. A trend we are noticing with the millennial generation is lack of interest as a technician. Unfortunately, San Diego is also lacking artisans (manufacturer employees). Most of this talent is in the mid-west."

They also discussed the challenges that come along with flying drones in San Diego with the international and military airports. "When you look at San Diego, we probably have one of the most challenging environments

with the downtown airport and military installations that need to be protected," said Paul Guckian, vice president of engineering of Qualcomm Technologies Inc. "We have the opportunity to collaborate with different technologies to show the FAA that it can be done safely. Nobody wins if the regulations don't move. The opportunity is there, you have to move the regulations. If you can showcase how the technology is used in a complex environment like San Diego, then you become a leader."

Home of the "phone, drone and genome," San Diego continues to be a leading force in the aviation industry. With companies like Cubic Corporation, that have been in San Diego since 1951 and employees more than 1,200 employees in the county, coupled with the strong military presence in the area, the industry is expected to continue to grow.

Jim Edwards, senior vice president general counsel and corporate secretary at Cubic Corporation, shared, "Our NextTraining strategy provides solutions and capabilities that better equip, train and engage our warfighters by replicating all warfare domains, revolutionizing combat training centers and optimizing cybersecurity. We do a lot of training both ground and air. We do it in traditional ways, as well as using gaming technology and avatars."

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mentioning the effectiveness of the training and the retention rates with it. "That could be applied across the board, like for commercial airlines, where we would be training their cabin crews."

"The aviation and aerospace industry is a fundamental part of San Diego's defense economy," said Gommer-Graves, president and CEO of SCEDC. "South County EDC is committed to helping the aerospace and aviation industries continue to thrive by bringing together high-level executives like we did today to develop collaborations and to help

with workforce development. Most importantly, we will be developing an action plan based on the needs they conveyed today."

The event kicked off with opening remarks from Clarissa Falcon, board president of SCEDC, followed by a brief regional overview by David Beutle of Future IQ.

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