SHIELD AI CHOOSES WICHITA REGION FOR CUTTING-EDGE FLIGHT TEST FACILITY

By Emily Barnwell

Defense technology leader Shield AI has selected the Newton City-County Airport as the site for a new flight test facility. It's a move that further cements the Wichita region's position as a national hub for aerospace innovation and advanced manufacturing.

Shield AI develops autonomy software and aircraft powered by artificial intelligence (AI) to protect service members and civilians in high-risk environments. The company's latest breakthrough, the X-BAT, is the world's first AI-piloted, vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) fighter jet.

Why Wichita

When choosing a location for its new facility, Shield AI searched nationwide and even internationally before landing in the Air Capital of the World.

"Above all else, we felt it was important to find a community that wanted to share in the adventure of achieving the greatest transformation in military aviation since airplanes first launched and landed from ships 115 years ago," shared Trey Lindsey, Senior Director of Customer Operations at Shield AI. "From the beginning, the Air Capital of the World embraced us with open arms and saw X-BAT for what it was, a revolution in aviation and a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do something special."

That spirit of partnership, paired with Wichita's deep manufacturing and engineering talent, rich history of aerospace innovation and passion for flight, made the decision clear. Shield AI will lease approximately 16,000 square feet of space and 3 acres of land on the east side of the airport, including 10,000 square feet of hangar space and 6,000 square feet of office space.

Partnership in Action

The project is the result of years of collaboration and engagement, including introductions facilitated by U.S. Senator Jerry Moran. The Partnership worked closely with Harvey County Economic Development, the Kansas Department of Commerce, Evergy, the City of Newton, and the Newton City-County Airport Authority to bring Shield AI's vision to life.

"The experience was amazing," Lindsey said. "After months of traveling and pitching our vision, arriving in Wichita felt like coming home. Andrew Nave and the Greater Wichita Partnership, along with Beth Shelton and many others at Harvey County Economic Development, quickly understood the significance of our plan and personally connected us with experts and stakeholders who made the decision possible. Without their early engagement, we might never have realized how perfect a fit Wichita was for Shield AI."

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Investing in the Future

Phase one of the project is expected to create more than 30 full-time jobs and generate nearly $1 million in site improvements over the next few years, with additional growth anticipated. Operations are slated to begin in April 2026.

Shield AI's leadership sees this as more than an expansion.

"Designing, testing and flying a single-engine tail-sitter VTOL autonomous jet is one of the hardest challenges in aviation and that's exactly why we're doing it," Lindsey explained. "If we get this right, we'll transform the way warfare is fought and ideally help prevent it altogether. Wichita's partnership and support will be vital, and we're excited to take on this journey together."

A Message to Other Companies

For other companies exploring where to expand or innovate next, Shield AI offers simple advice: call the Partnership.

"If you're in aviation, Wichita's track record speaks for itself," Lindsey shared. "With over 100 years of aircraft manufacturing and more than one-third of all American general-aviation planes built here, the depth of talent and drive in this community is unmatched."