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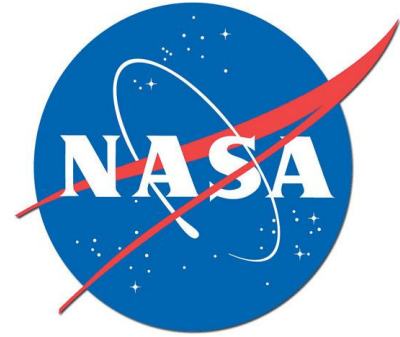
NASA plans 'rebirth' at Plum Brook

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PERKINS TWP.

NASA Plum Brook Station is undergoing a "rebirth" and heading into its busiest time since the boom days of the Apollo program.

NASA officials announced Monday they will build a new entrance to NASA Plum Brook, allowing motorists access via Scheid Road off of U.S. 250. They said they also hope to build a space-themed attraction at Plum Brook to draw tourists who already come to the Sandusky area to visit Cedar Point and the waterparks.



NASA announced its plans to raise the profile of Plum Brook at a press conference at NASA Glenn Research Center on Monday.

Officials said they expect the flurry of new activity surrounding the Orion spacecraft, designed to carry astronauts back to the moon, will generate new jobs for Northeast Ohio. They declined to speculate about how many jobs might be generated.

Retired Brig. Gen. David Stringer, director of Plum Brook Management Office, said Plum Brook is undergoing a renaissance.

"Certainly, it's more promising than it's been since the Apollo days," he said.

After the Apollo program ended in 1972, the Nixon administration shut down Plum Brook's nuclear reactor and much of its other activities.

NASA officials said enhancements to Plum Brook's Space Power Facility are the main component of the Plum Brook master plan. The Space Power Facility already boasts the world's largest thermal vacuum chamber, a giant cylinder 100 feet in diameter and 122 feet high. It allows NASA to test Orion spacecraft in an environment replicating the airlessness and temperature extremes of space.

NASA already has awarded a \$51.4 million contract to augment the Space Power Facility by adding an area to perform noise and vibration tests on spacecraft, replicating the rattle and noise that takes place when space vehicles are blasted into orbit.

Stringer said modifications also are planned for B-2, Plum Brook's facility for testing the upper stages of liquid fuel rockets.

Plum Brook's current entrance is off Bogart Road. Within three years, NASA plans to begin modifying Scheid Road for a new entrance. The change gets the entrance away from a residential area, enhances safety at the NASA installation and makes it easier for trucks to bring cargo into Plum Brook. The new entrance also is closer to Plum Brook's main test facilities, said Joe Morris, NASA's chief architect for Plum Brook and Glenn.

Stringer said he'd like to see Plum Brook develop a tourist attraction that would show off NASA. He said no money has been devoted to the proposal yet.

"It's simply an idea," he said. "We're allowed to dream. That's a dream."

In the short term, Stringer said he'd like to take some simple steps to raise NASA's profile, such as painting the NASA logo on the dome of the Space Power Facility and parking an old aircraft or two on land next to U.S. 250.

NASA must maintain buffer zones to protect Erie County residents if something goes wrong during testing at Plum Brook, but there are plenty of ideas for how those zones could be used, NASA officials said.

Besides a tourist attraction, the zones could be used for a new airport, for an office park or manufacturing area serving NASA contractors, for parkland or conservation areas, for a new county water treatment plant or for projects with the Department of Homeland Security, they said.

Stringer reiterated that NASA would love to have a new airport built in Erie County that would provide easy access to NASA Plum Brook Station.

Ideally, the airport would have a long runway, allowing big aircraft such as C-5 cargo planes to deliver large sections of spacecraft for testing, he said.