

Boeing's Historical Impact and Leadership
in the Greater Wichita Area Through and After World War II
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Kansas' contribution to the war effort of World War II is dubbed by many as the Battle of Kansas. Around 200,000 men and women served in the armed forces and naval air stations were established in Olathe and Hutchinson. Salina, Topeka, Pratt, Walker, Herington, Great Bend, Liberal, Independence, Coffeyville, Dodge City, Garden City and Winfield all became homes to army airfields. Factories at Jayhawk Ordnance Works and Sunflower Ordnance Works produced munitions and weapons. Farms produced more food than at any point before or after the war. Boeing, previously primarily based in Seattle, also established a new aircraft factory in Wichita producing trainers, gliders, and bombers. Since then, Boeing has led in areas of aviation and manufacturing in Wichita(The Battle of Kansas). Boeing not only affected World War II through aircraft development but also had a large economic impact on the greater Wichita area for years; additionally, their philanthropy built leaders and created generations that would continue their legacy.

Boeing's first aircraft plant was originally built in Seattle, Washington. As the U.S. and the world began to move towards World War II, this location was no longer pragmatic for tactical and business reasons. Like many other aircraft companies, Boeing sought the middle U.S. as a location to build airplanes away from potential coastal attacks while accessing an available and eager workforce. The aircraft plant Lloyd Stearman established in 1926 was able to assist in Boeing's move to Wichita. In 1934, the Stearman company became a subsidiary of The Boeing Company; however, they still developed and produced planes under their own name. Finally, in 1938, the

Stearman company became the Stearman division of the Boeing Airplane Company (Boeing Wichita History - Wings over Kansas). Boeing was now a prominent corporate fixture in the greater Wichita area, providing not only jobs but supplementing many service industries and growing local towns and cities.

Even before the official entrance of the U.S. into World War II, Boeing was placing a substantial amount of money into the Wichita plant to prepare it for large scale airplane building and the looming threat. As of October 16, 1940, there was an investment of \$3,500,000 to increase the size of the plant and to employ 4,000 additional people, and, in May 1941, a further \$125,000,000 was invested in the Wichita plant to employ more people and expand the size of the factory (Tihen). During the war, peak production of the long range B-29 bomber was at 4.2 bombers a day (The Battle of Kansas). Of the 3,888 B-29s produced during the war, nearly half were produced at the Wichita plant. The Boeing design of both the B-29 and B-17 were produced by other aircraft companies to ensure a large, stable fleet. Many of these aircraft, especially in Wichita, were assembled by women whose brothers, husbands, and fathers had been deployed to fight abroad. Boeing also received a subcontract from Cessna to produce gliders to be used for the Allied invasion of Europe (THE BOEING STORY).

As World War II waned, the demand for bombers greatly decreased. Boeing Wichita was committed to survival and growth, however. By swapping to a commercial emphasis in production, Boeing was able to grow not only their business but continue their military development as well while contributing to the growth of Wichita and the surrounding area. When they moved from military aircraft to commercial aircraft, they

used what they learned about mass production. In 1953, Boeing's B-47 jet was used to refuel another B-47, thus bringing about the mid-air refueling tankers. This led to 1954's production of the KC-135, often seen in the air above Wichita over the last sixty years, and which is still in use today by the U.S. Air Force to refuel many military aircraft. By 1966, they released the 737 aircraft, by far is best-selling commercial jetliner in history (Historical Snapshot: 737 Commercial Transport) Both of the presidential jetliners, Air Force One, are based around the concept of the 747, the first jumbo jet. Up through 2014, the Air Force One jetliners were maintained at the Wichita plant ("White House Museum"). Since 2006, Boeing has received at least \$165,468,909,628 worth of contracts from the Department of Defense(Boeing Defense Contracts). Amongst their current military ventures are their new KC-46A Pegasus air refueling tankers, soon to be part of the Wichita skyway (Daryl 2).

Boeing employed increasing numbers of people from Wichita and surrounding communities throughout the decades to ensure these aircraft were built and serviced and was for many years the largest employer in the area, reaching a peak of over 35,000 people in 1957. Service industries such as grocery and convenience stores, medical services, and schools grew to serve the growing community. Additionally, sub-contracting for various aircraft parts grew small businesses and maintained their presence here by putting money into other companies that provide jobs for many in the Sedgwick County community(Boeing to Boost Spending with Kansas Suppliers).

Boeing Wichita not only established a legacy of both military and commercial aircraft, but it also served as a leader in philanthropy. Former non-profit administrator

Wendy Donaldson explains, “I could always approach Boeing for support, whether I was running an arts program for special needs students or developing a leadership camp for a diversity organization. Boeing was always there to back all sorts of community-based projects.” Their support of post-secondary education is obvious in Kansas, supporting College of Engineering at Wichita State University(Spirit of the Gift Biography Project) and the College of Education at Kansas State University (Lifetime Honor Roll Gifts) and recognizing faculty who show excellence and helping them usher in a new age of education.

Boeing Wichita’s legacy is not only one of leadership in the aircraft industry but also of community leadership through education, protecting the environment, taking care of military veterans and providing humanitarian relief (Boeing Community Engagement Page). They’ve also encouraged the Wichita community to restore relics that showed their prowess and innovations during WWII. The B-29 “Doc” was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Forces on March 23, 1945. It was returned for restoration in May 2000, then again delivered to the community 70 years later as a fully restored B-29. It will fly to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to participate in the Experimental Aircraft Association’s AirVenture Oshkosh airshow(Doc's Friends - Restoring History).

Through time, Boeing has proved that they could adapt to a changing landscape. They have moved locations, changed aircraft production, and increased output of both commercial and military aircraft. They have also shown that they can go above and beyond adapting by growing the community around their business through partnering with small business and supporting local educational and charitable causes. They have

taken the initiative through community engagement, philanthropy, and helped the greater Wichita area. Boeing's leadership has left a legacy that continues to affect Wichita and the surrounding areas, a legacy of prosperity and hope that will potentially influence Wichitans and others for many more years.

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