



This photo show the barracks at Hancock Air Force Base in the 1970s when they were still in use. (Onondaga Historical Association)

# GHOST TOWN gone

DEMOLITION OF ABANDONED MILITARY HOUSING AT FORMER HANCOCK AIR BASE COMPLETED; INDUSTRIAL PARK RISES

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Like the Air Force base it was once a part of, a military ghost town north of Syracuse is no more.

Demolition crews last month finished knocking down 85 buildings containing more than 200 abandoned apartments at the former Hancock Air Force Base off East Taft Road in Cicero.

The \$2.4 million state-funded demolition job completed the decades-long removal and replacement of 50-year-old military infrastructure at the former air base.

Built during World War II as a bomber base, the facility became a military communications center during the Cold War. It closed in 1984 and has been slowly turned into an industrial park named Hancock Airpark.

With its streets, sidewalks and buildings abandoned for nearly 30 years, the base's housing complex took on the appearance of a ghost town over the years.

There once was talk of renovating the site's many apartment buildings and leasing them out. But with no money available for renovations, the buildings decayed to the point that demolition was the only option, said Lori Dietz, vice president of operations for CenterState CEO, the economic development organization that has overseen the redevelopment of most of the former base into a business park.

Dietz said the housing was the last to go because it was one of the most expensive tasks in the base's redevelopment.

The transformation of the base

into Hancock Airpark cost \$12 million and included the demolition of 138 vacant buildings, removal of 25,000 feet of asbestos-covered steam pipes, new road construction and installation of sanitary and storm sewers.

Onondaga County acquired much of the former base from the federal government in 1987 and contracted with CenterState's predecessor, the Metropolitan Development Association, to clean up the site and turn it into an industrial park.

The redevelopment has taken nearly three decades because the federal government did not provide any money for the job when it closed the base, Dietz said.

The demolition work and infrastructure improvements were done sporadically over the years as state and federal grants could be obtained. Operational costs were funded through the sale of lots to private businesses.

"This was a true public-private partnership that has worked tremendously well," Dietz said.

The park has 11 business tenants, employing approximately 750 people, according to CenterState. The businesses have invested \$42 million into their facilities at the park, providing a pretty good return on the \$12 million public investment, Dietz said. In addition, 87.5 acres of land have been added to the tax rolls, she said.

The land where the housing stood is not park of the park, and no decision has been made on its future use. The city of Syracuse acquired it from the



G.A. Braun Inc., a maker of industrial laundry equipment, is one of Hancock Airpark's largest tenants. (Rick Moriarty / rmoriarty@syracuse.com)



Time has not been kind to the complex that once housed military families at Hancock Air Force Base in Cicero. Demolition of the long-abandoned housing was recently completed. (Rick Moriarty / rmoriarty@syracuse.com)

### AIRPARK TENANTS

- JADAK Technologies Inc.
- Gaylord Bros. Inc.
- Health Direct
- G.A. Braun
- ICM Controls Corp.
- Air Innovations.
- Empire Crane.
- Hofmann Sausage distribution facility
- Custom Lawn-Scapes Inc.
- AddCom Electronics
- Certified Environmental Services

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# 5 buildings remain on former base

## 5 BUILDINGS, FROM PAGE B-1

federal government in 1999 because about 25 acres of the 85-acre site are within the “protected” zone of a long-planned third runway at nearby Syracuse Hancock International Airport.

Airport Executive Director Christina Callahan said the Syracuse Regional Airport Authority, which recently took over operation of the airport under a 40-year lease with the city, will be studying whether to the 60 acres that are not needed for the future runway should be made available to private development like the type occurring at Hancock Airpark.

“That’s something we’re going to be looking at in 2015,” she said.

Dietz said 30 of the 200 acres of land owned by the county remain available for redevelopment. With its work now done, CenterState has turned the operation of the park over to the county, she said.

There are still five of the old base’s buildings still standing, the largest being the former SAGE communications center. All are owned or leased by private companies.

