

# 'Hockey stick of job growth' fueled by space, aerospace industries across Brevard

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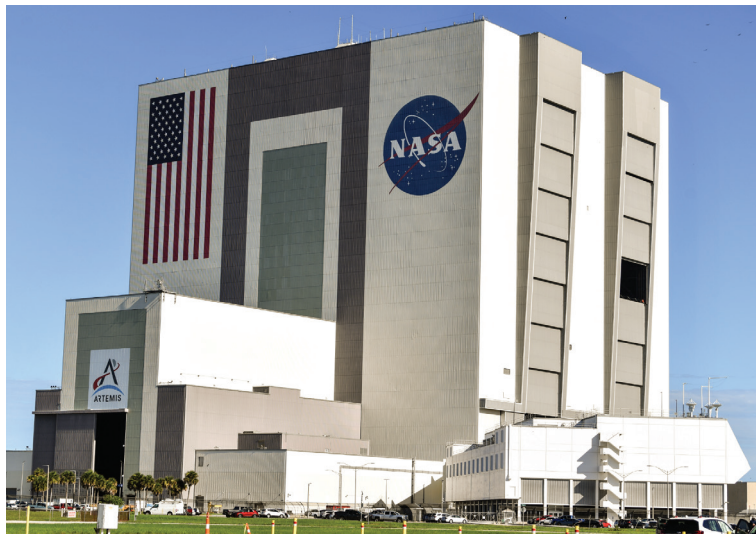


Rather than die on the vine, high-tech space and aerospace industries have mushroomed and flourished across Florida's Space Coast — to magnitudes few could have predicted — since NASA mothballed the space shuttle program after Atlantis' final flight in July 2011.

Think billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos — the two richest men in the world — and their respective companies SpaceX and Blue Origin. And national defense contractors like L3Harris Technologies, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin.

Viewed on a chart, Brevard County's annual aerospace-aviation workforce statistics show "a hockey stick of job growth" climbing upward in recent years, said Mike Miller, Space Florida vice president of external affairs, speaking during an April 22 Melbourne Regional Chamber presentation.

Example: Brevard County's workforce in that sector practically doubled during the brief span from 2017 (7,847 workers) to 2023 (14,828 workers), Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast records show.



And SpaceX is delivering a mammoth program now under construction: The gargantuan Starship-Super Heavy rocket system is coming to NASA's Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. Economists expect at least \$1.8 billion in projected capital investment and 600 new full-time jobs by 2030.

"It's a very exciting time, just as it was back in the '50s and the '60s," said Robert Taylor, a Florida Institute of Technology history professor.

"Someday, when Americans actually make the trip back to the moon — or the ultimate trip to Mars — they'll start right here in Brevard County," Taylor said.

Aside from SpaceX, EDC officials provided a list of Brevard's anchor corporate investments since the end of the shuttle program, nearly 14 years ago:

**Blue Origin.** In a 2015 move hailed by economic development officials as a shift "from a shuttle shutdown to a commercial space rebirth," Bezo's private company announced it would build a rocket manufacturing facility on the Space Coast.

Fast forward to today. Blue Origin has invested more than \$3 billion in facilities in Florida and employs more than 3,000

workers in the state, primarily on the Space Coast. The company's ever-growing rocket factory on Merritt Island sprawls across more than 230 acres, building massive New Glenn two-stage rockets.

Former NASA administrator Sean O'Keefe told FLORIDA TODAY this "unbelievable" complex is one of the biggest construction infrastructure efforts at the Cape since the 1960s.

**L3Harris Technologies.** In 2015, Melbourne-based Harris Corp., which partnered with NASA on space projects for decades, acquired Exelis Inc., a global aerospace company based in McLean, Virginia, in a \$4.75 billion deal.

That same year, Harris Corp. opened the six-story, 450,000-square-foot Harris Technology Center in Palm Bay to house about 1,400 employees. And in 2019, the company merged with L3 Technologies to form L3Harris Technologies, America's sixth-largest defense company.

Today, L3Harris ranks as Brevard County's third-largest employer, trailing only Health First and Brevard Public Schools. In 2023, the defense-contracting giant completed its \$4.7 billion acquisition of Aerojet Rocketdyne.

**Northrop Grumman.** Major expansion started two years after Atlantis' final flight at the company's ever-growing campus at Melbourne Orlando International Airport. That's where engineers developed the U.S. Air Force's B-21 Raider long-range stealth bomber, which is under production and testing in California.

Northrop Grumman's Melbourne campus employs about 5,000 workers, including contract employees, across 2 million square feet of office, labs and manufacturing space. The building count jumped from six to 17 between 2016 and 2022.

And work is underway on another 38-acre, multi-phase expansion complex on airport-owned property along NASA Boulevard for about 1,200 employees.

**Lockheed Martin.** Back in 2005, the defense contractor announced it would retain 1,000 jobs by keeping the U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Unit at Port Canaveral, the EDC reported. By 2017, the company moved its Fleet Ballistic Missile headquarters from Sunnyvale, California, to Titusville, bringing in 350 new jobs.

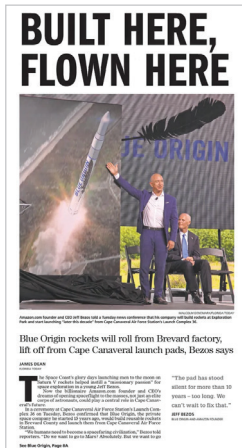
In 2021, Lockheed Martin opened its Spacecraft Test, Assembly and Resource (STAR) Center in Titusville to expand manufacturing, assembly and testing for NASA's Orion spacecraft program.

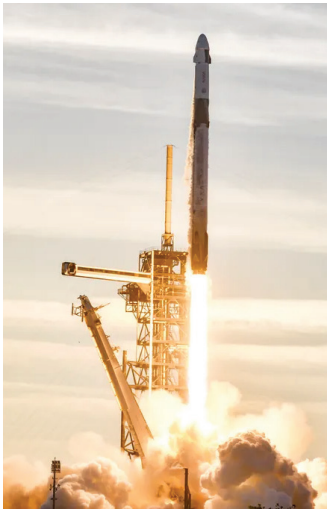
And in January, the firm announced plans to build a \$140-million advanced manufacturing facility in Titusville supporting the U.S. Navy's next-generation Trident II D5 LE2 ballistic missile program. This expansion is projected to open in 2027 and generate up to 300 new jobs with average salaries of \$89,000.

**Embraer.** Since 2008, Embraer has announced four development phases creating its first North American business-jet-building campus at the Melbourne airport, generating more than 1,000 jobs and capital investments topping \$155 million.

The Brazilian company operates business jet production facilities, a global customer center and its first U.S.-based engineering and technology center here. Embraer's Phenom 100EV and the Phenom 300E, which can carry up to 11 passengers and crew — are built "nose to tail" in Melbourne.

Alongside Embraer, Lynda Weatherman, EDC president and CEO, pointed to Lockheed's Orion spacecraft program as leading a "paradigm shift" in Brevard's aerospace-aviation sector. She said the EDC led the aggressive effort to land Orion.





“For the first time in 50 years of history of space in the state of Florida, we’re assembling a launch vehicle. Ever. And people need to see that and understand: That was the paradigm shift,” she said.

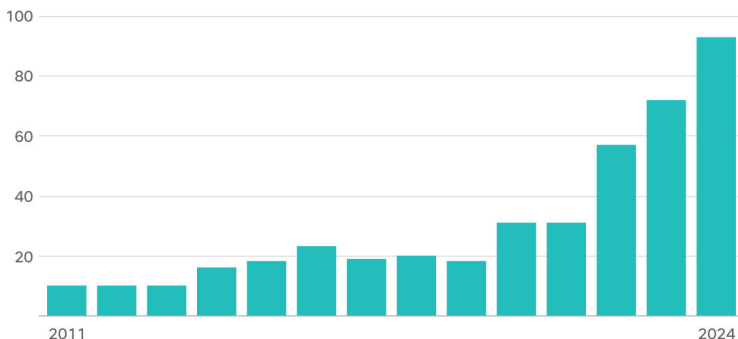
Illustrating that point, Weatherman cited Dassault Falcon Jet’s new \$115 million maintenance complex under construction at Melbourne Orlando International Airport, which will service corporate aircraft from the U.S. East Coast, Mexico and Latin America. The first aircraft should arrive in July.

Space Florida President and CEO Rob Long said those developments helped spur continuing accelerated growth. Just the past two years, he said Space Florida-backed projects added more than 1,500 jobs and \$2.7 billion of investment on Space Coast — generating roughly \$750 million in economic impact.

Back in 2011, the year Atlantis flew for the final time, the Space Coast hosted 10 orbital rocket launches carrying about 95,334 pounds of payload into orbit, Space Florida statistics show. Civil agencies like NASA and NOAA accounted for six of those missions, while the other four launches were for the Department of Defense.

Fast forward to last year. A record-shattering 93 launches lifted more than 2.74 million pounds of payload into orbit — a whopping 29-fold increase. SpaceX rockets accounted for 88 of last year’s 93 missions, while United Launch Alliance rockets launched the remaining five.

### Launches from the Space Coast, by year



SOURCE Space Florida; GRAPHIC Stephen J. Beard/USA TODAY

“The (rocket) launch is exciting to see. And it’s in many ways a visual metaphor of what’s happening here, if you think about it,” Weatherman said.

Sarah Beaudin, a Northrop Grumman systems engineering director, has worked for the defense contractor for 22 years. She moved from Southern California to central Brevard in 2018, and she serves as technical chief on the U.S. Navy E-2D Advanced Hawkeye radar-dome aircraft program.

Beaudin said she enjoys Brevard’s easy accessibility, particularly to the beaches, and she and her daughter picked up birdwatching as a hobby. How has the Space Coast changed since she arrived?

“The growth. There has been a lot of growth. I live right off Pineda Causeway. When I bought my house, it was a dead end on the other side of (Interstate) 95. Now, there’s Costco and lots and lots of houses — and more being built,” she said.

Space Launch Delta 45 now projects 107 rockets will launch during 2025. Looking ahead, Federal Aviation Administration officials are collecting public comment on SpaceX’s proposal to boost Falcon rocket launches up to 120 per year just from Launch Complex 40 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station.

“It really used to be an event when the shuttle went off, and people would line the roads and they’d watch the shuttle go up. Night launches were particularly spectacular. But today, it seems like it’s not so much an event ... sometimes, it seems daily there’s rockets going up,” Florida Historical Society Executive Director Ben Brotemarkle said.

“The future looks bright for the space program. And there’s certainly continued growth that you can see today in Brevard County. It never ceases to amaze me driving down the roads,” Brotemarkle said.

For the latest news from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and NASA’s Kennedy Space Center, visit [floridatoday.com/space](http://floridatoday.com/space).

Rick Neale is a Space Reporter at FLORIDA TODAY. Contact Neale at [rneale@floridatoday.com](mailto:rneale@floridatoday.com). Twitter/X: @RickNeale1

