

**Golden LEAF announces grant to assess economic opportunity for eastern North Carolina**  
*Foundation funds study of F-35B basing opportunity at MCAS Cherry Point*

**ROCKY MOUNT, N.C. – December 17, 2009** – At its December Board meeting, the Golden LEAF Foundation Board of Directors awarded \$115,000 to North Carolina’s Eastern Region, the regional economic development partnership, to conduct an economic assessment of the potential basing of F-35B Joint Strike Fighter squadrons at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Cherry Point.

“The Golden LEAF Board of Directors recognizes the potential creation and retention of jobs that the F-35 basing would afford North Carolina,” said Dan Gerlach, Golden LEAF president. “The military is a strong economic driver for many parts of the state, and the Foundation fully supports viable projects that will create or enhance job opportunities for both military personnel and civilians.”

Over the next several years, the Navy will be replacing F/A-18s with the new F-35 fighter jet. MCAS Cherry Point currently has F/A-18 squadrons and is being considered as a potential location to base F-35 squadrons along with other air stations around the country. This basing decision is critically important to job retention and creation at MCAS Cherry Point and the Fleet Readiness Center (FRC) East, which provides maintenance and repair operations for the Marine Corps fleet. Combined, this facility is the largest employer east of I-95 and represents an important economic engine for eastern North Carolina.

“The military is a critical piece of North Carolina’s economy,” said Gov. Bev Perdue. “As we continue to create and retain jobs in our state, North Carolina must continue to look for opportunities to grow our defense, homeland security, and aerospace sector. Our focus on opportunities like these helps make us the most military-friendly state in America.”

The Golden LEAF-funded study will define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with this economic opportunity. Work will also be done to identify and characterize other potential effects on the region such as new training and employment opportunities for existing residents, contracting opportunities for businesses, potential business creation, and challenges to realizing the opportunity. The results of the study would be used to inform residents, state/local public officials and other key stakeholders.

“We are appreciative of the support from the Golden LEAF Foundation and North Carolina Military Foundation,” said John Chaffee, North Carolina’s Eastern Region president and CEO. “It is critically important to gauge the relative strengths and weaknesses of the MCAS Cherry Point and FRC East against the needs and criteria associated with the F-35B basing. These facilities have an enormous economic impact on our region.”

“The N.C. Military Foundation is determined to be proactive in working with our partners to realize the opportunities at hand,” said Will Austin, N.C. Military Foundation executive director. “North Carolina understands the importance of this initiative to our national security and to supporting the presence of the military in our state.”

**About the Golden LEAF Foundation:**

The Golden LEAF Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1999 to help transform North Carolina’s economy. The foundation receives one-half of North Carolina’s funds from the

1998 Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers and places special emphasis on assisting tobacco-dependent, economically distressed and/or rural communities across the state. The Golden LEAF Foundation works in partnership with governmental entities, educational institutions, economic development organizations and nonprofits to achieve its mission. The foundation has awarded 858 grants totaling more than \$404 million since its inception. For more information, or to learn more about applying for a grant, visit [www.goldenleaf.org](http://www.goldenleaf.org) or call (888) 684-8404.

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