



After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Chandler residents rushed to help with the war effort. More than 500 of the town's 1,300 residents eventually served. Those left at home helped by growing victory gardens, holding scrap metal and bond drives, and filling the void left by those who enlisted. Some would-be soldiers and sailors left high school to enlist. To remember those serving, the community erected an honor roll billboard listing the names of everyone from the Chandler area. The war effort expanded locally when the military established a pilot training facility just east of Chandler. Williams Air Field, affectionately known as Willie, was constructed by famed housing developer Del Webb for \$1.5 million. When the base opened in October 1941, the PX, the base's commissary, had one case of soda, one carton of cigarettes and a few candy bars. Willie offered few other amenities. The officers and enlisted men had to travel eight miles to Chandler to bathe, and had to carry drinking water from two miles away. Despite these inauspicious beginnings, Williams Air Field grew to be one of the largest pilot training facilities in the country during the war. Thousands of people moved to Chandler because of the base, including both civilians and military personnel. Because Chandler was the closest town, those who lived on the base would travel to Chandler to bank, shop, watch movies, and socialize with community members. After the war, the base, renamed Williams Air Force Base, continued to grow. Williams began training jet pilots in the late 1940s, and continued for the rest of its existence. In the 1970s it graduated the Air Force's first class of female pilots. The ties between Chandler and Williams were strengthened when the Air Force donated an F-86d fighter jet that had flown over Korea to be displayed in Chandler's downtown. Williams Air Force Base closed in 1993, and is now home to Phoenix Mesa Gateway Airport. World War II and Chandler's long relationship with the Williams Air Force Base changed the face of the community and set Chandler on the long path to growth.

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