

THE DISRUPTOR

Anduril Industries is set to shake up Central Ohio's economy while it upends how the Pentagon buys weapons of war.

Anduril's Fury, an AI-powered fighter jet designed to fly without a pilot.

ANDURIL INDUSTRIES



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Anduril Industries Inc. executive Zachary Mears knows Ohio, but the Buckeye State is still getting acquainted with the upstart defense technology company – as is the rest of the nation.

Mears is a defense industry veteran, having worked in top positions at the Pentagon and advised aerospace and defense clients at the law firm Covington & Burling LLP. He's now the senior vice president of strategy for Anduril, a rapidly growing company that has promised to create 4,000 jobs at its planned manufacturing site near Rickenbacker International Airport, Arsenal-1.

Before all that, he “grew up as a kid in Springfield, Ohio.”

“Ultimately, (I) found my way into graduate school at Ohio State, went to Washington, D.C., and had the good fortune to work at the highest level at the Pentagon for almost a decade,” he told *Columbus Business First*. “Built a family, wanted that family to have roots back here in Central Ohio (and) moved back in 2016.”



Image: Anduril

Zach Mears

Mears joined Anduril in 2021 as the company was gaining more attention for its bid to shake up how the U.S. Department of Defense buys weapons.

The company's founder, [Palmer Luckey](#), has argued that the defense sector has lacked innovation for decades while being dominated by the same five companies – Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Raytheon Technologies (now RTX Corp.) and General Dynamics.

The system rewards predictability, not capital risk and product development, Mears said.

“The incentive structure displaced the willingness and ability of most traditional companies to invest capital ahead, innovate and [develop product in advance of need](#),” Mears said. “We felt like a company needed to exist that had those qualities. It’s been a bit of a time coming.”

Anduril's mission is paying off lately.

After about eight years in business, the California-based company has skyrocketed in value and has begun to capture the attention of the general public.

The company was the subject of a *60 Minutes* segment in May, and shortly thereafter it raised \$2.5 billion in new funding, valuing the company at \$30.5 billion.

It was also No. 1 on CNBC's annual Disruptor 50 list of the most innovative private companies.

"It's great validation that we don't only have great companies that have great jobs and do great things in Ohio, but we're recruiting the next generation of companies that are going to disrupt and change these industries," said Kenny McDonald, CEO of One Columbus, the region's economic development agency.

"And they're choosing Ohio."

How did Anduril land in Ohio?

Ohio faced stiff competition to land the Anduril expansion, which is projected to grow to 5 million square feet.

"They had, for obvious reasons, lots of suitors that were interested in having their business," said JobsOhio CEO J.P. Nauseef.

North Carolina, for example, fought hard and was prepared to offer more than \$300 million in incentives, according to the *Triangle Business Journal*, a *Business First* sister paper.

States such as Texas and Florida were also in the running.

“We were fortunate over the process to have a number of states that brought to us a set of both sites, as well as an existing and growing labor pool, that met our needs,” Mears said.

“Ohio really distinguished itself from all the other states,” he added.

Ultimately, Ohio won after pledging a 30-year, 2.59% Job Creation Tax Credit for Anduril, which will be [worth an estimated \\$452.2 million](#) if all job creation goals are met.



Gov. Mike DeWine speaking at the press conference announcing Anduril Industries Inc.'s plans to start production early next year at the plant called Arsenal-1 and create 4,000 jobs by 2035.

JACK KUSTRON FOR CBF

JobsOhio this week also agreed to give the project a [\\$310 million grant over 10 years to support the project](#).

Anduril chose Ohio despite it not being as nationally known as Texas and other states, McDonald said.

“Ohio has so many assets and such a diverse offering for people. Sometimes that gets buried,” he said. “That’s the hard work we have to do to market and develop business and build relationships with the people that help companies make these decisions.”

“We knew the value proposition that we were conveying,” Nauseef said. “We knew how to convey it. And they, I think, understood the value of the attributes that Ohio had to offer.”

Central Ohio also wasn’t Anduril’s only option in the state. Defense is a huge part of the Dayton region’s economy. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is not only the largest single-site employer in the Dayton region, it’s also the biggest in all of Ohio.

“There were certainly opportunities in Dayton that were attractive,” Mears said, “and Wright-Patt has been and will continue to be a core customer

for us.”

But Rickenbacker, in addition to [Central Ohio’s workforce availability](#), gave Columbus the upper hand.

“(The site) gives us the ability to move in and out people and product, arguably more efficiently than we could have done anywhere else,” Mears said. “I think we certainly feel like we could have made good choices in either case. But for us, [Rickenbacker and the parcel that we’re building on made the most sense.](#)”

Finding workers

Anduril is charging full speed ahead to get its [Pickaway County facility up to full speed](#). In April, the company started hiring, including for senior-

level positions.

Though there will be a centralized building on the campus that will house functions like administration and government relations, as well as workforce training, the jobs at the [campus will predominantly be manufacturing-oriented technicians](#), Mears said.

“To be plain about it, the core sets of activities that will happen on the campus, both in the initial building and in the subsequent buildings as we develop the

campus, will largely be production facilities,” he said.

In 2035, when Arsenal-1 is fully operational, the average salary for workers is expected to be just over \$132,305 annually, JobsOhio said.

The 4,000 jobs that Anduril is promising represents the [largest single job creation pledge in Ohio history](#) – both by number of positions and payroll, projected to top \$530 million over the next 10 years.

They won’t all come at once, with the company pledging to build up to that number by 2035.



Anduril Industries plans 5 million square feet of manufacturing space, seen in a rendering, for Arsenal-1 near Rickenbacker International Airport.

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As exciting as it is for the region to land so many jobs, it's also a big undertaking to fill them. The company is working out how to fill the workforce pipeline.

“Right now, we're in discovery,” Mears said.

“The next year is really about building the relationships and understanding where the gaps are in certification programs and capacity of those programs ... to really figure out what do we invest in together that doesn't exist today,” he said.

Mears specifically mentioned Ohio State University and Columbus State Community College as important partners in finding the right workers for the job.

McDonald said Anduril is working closely with workforce development specialists at One Columbus and JobsOhio to figure out the workforce puzzle.

One Columbus representatives have made several trips to Anduril's headquarters in Costa Mesa, California, to get “exposed to (the company's) process and existing production lines,” he said.

“4,000 jobs in over 10 years is a big deal,” McDonald said, “but it’s very doable.”

From JobsOhio's perspective, this is its bread and butter.

"We're built to do this, and we've got a great track record doing it," Nauseef said.

It helps that this isn't Central Ohio's first experience with a major manufacturer.

Intel's \$28 billion semiconductor fabrication complex under construction in New Albany plans to create 3,000 jobs.

Honda also employs thousands at its network of plants and suppliers in the region.

"Central Ohio has developed a robust workforce training network to respond to Intel and others," said Tim Colburn, executive director of the Pickaway Progress Partnership, the economic development agency for Pickaway County.

Intel and Honda, though, have considerably more name recognition than Anduril.

“We want folks [around the state to know us better](#),” Mears said. “We want them to have that affinity for what we do, what we’re bringing and will ultimately build here.

“We know that will come from not just more general brand awareness,” he said, “but us being present in the communities in ways that are authentic to us.”

Anduril, for example, sponsored Folds of Honor Friday, which recognizes military service members and first responders at PGA Tour events, at the Memorial Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin.

“There’s a strong fabric of both service and veteran communities throughout Ohio, and in particular here in the Columbus region,” Mears said. “We want to find ways to give them opportunities to serve and work in the campus.”



Palmer Luckey founded Anduril Industries, which now is valued at more than \$30 billion.

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Economy of scale

Anduril has facilities and offices all over the world, but Ohio will play a major role in its future.

“The impetus for Arsenal was the maturity, where we are as a company,” Mears said.

It's too early to know exactly what percentage of Anduril products will come out of the Central Ohio plant, he said.

“But the intent in investing into this campus is that there's an economy of scale that we gain from concentrating that activity,” Mears said. “The general bias is going to be to take advantage of that economy and do as much as possible here.”

That's a really big deal to Pickaway County, in particular, which hasn't had the sort of anchor employer that other quadrants of the region have – think Intel to the northeast or Honda in northwest Central Ohio.

“We've got some great employers, don't get me wrong,” Colburn said, “but not on the magnitude of Intel.

“The Central Ohio market draws tremendous talent from Pickaway County,” he said. “Part of our long-term strategy is getting more people to not drive through Pickaway County to get to a job, but to stay here.”

It will take the entire region – and state – to help power Arsenal-1.

“They're an innovative group. They're a pioneering group,” Nauseef said. “And I think it's exciting when the confluence of what Ohio has to offer matches so nicely with such a progressive company. I think it bodes well for the future.”