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Commercial airlines struggle with increasing flight demand, lack of pilots

Iowa airlines are finding it difficult to replace commercial pilots and struggling to meet the demand of flyers.



Isabella Cervantes (https://dailyiowan.com/staff_name/isabella-cervantes/)

The Municipal Airport is seen in Iowa City on Sunday, Sept. 18,



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Alejandro Rojas

(https://dailyiowan.com/staff_name/alejandro-rojas/),

News Reporter

September 18, 2022

As a national pilot shortage sweeps across the country, Iowa's commercial airports are also searching for more aviators.

Smaller, regional airports, like the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids, decreased the number of flights they run, limiting access to travel for local Iowans.

Recently, American Airlines stopped its service in the Dubuque Regional Airport (<https://www.wvik.org/wvik-top-stories/2022-09-06/american-airlines-abandons-dubuque-airport-loses>), the only airline to service that airport. This means flyers will have to travel at least 70 miles to the nearest airport if they want to fly.

Eastern Iowa Airport Director Marty Lenss said the pilot shortage deeply affects regional airports, including the Cedar Rapids airport.

"The pilot shortage has become pronounced to the point where, today, there's 52 communities that have lost one of the big three airlines," said Lenss.

Lens said the pilot shortage isn't the only issue, as

An Australian punting showcase: Iowa's Tory Taylor and Rutgers' Adam Korsak to face off
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airlines also face a shortage of plane technicians and increases in the costs of fuel.

The price of jet fuel

(<https://www.iata.org/en/publications/economics/fuel-monitor/>) in North America jumped 73.6 percent compared to the price of jet fuel in Sept. 2021.

Drew Lemos, senior director of government affairs for the Regional Airline Association, said the shortage hurts more than just customers.

“It’s having a negative impact on air service,” said Lemos. “There’s going to be less flight options, more delays, and more frustration. It’s bad for the consumer, and bad news for the airports.”

RELATED: Iowa City considers pilot program for late night, Sunday transportation services

(<https://dailyiowan.com/2021/01/09/iowa-city-considers-pilot-program-for-late-night-sunday-transportation-services/>)

In the short term, Lemos suggested raising the pilot retirement age from 65 to 67.

The aviation industry has a mandatory

(<https://www.alpa.org/-/media/ALPA/Files/pdfs/advocacy/alpa-pilot-supply-retirement-age.pdf?la=en>) retirement age

of 65, and NBC reported in June that roughly 5,773 pilots are retiring each year

(<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/pilot-shortage-start-ageism-rcna34831>). During the pandemic, other pilots were fired or furloughed from the lack of air travel.

“Pilots have to go through flight medicals on a very regular basis,” said Lens. “It’s really not a problem to change it from 65 to 67.”

Efforts to increase number of Iowa pilots

Jet Air, a charter company that flies out of the Iowa City Municipal Airport, is offering students the chance



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to become pilots through its private flight school.

The company partnered with Kirkwood Community College to create an aviation technician program, starting in the fall semester of 2023.

Jet Air Vice President Matt Wolford said it is a service available to students who are willing to learn.

“It’s not impossible to become a pilot, and students can come here and learn at the airport,” said Wolford.

Lemos said people should take advantage of the piloting opportunities available to them.

“There’s never been a better time to be an airline pilot,” said Lemos. “It’s an amazing career and offers plenty of opportunities.”

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About the Contributor

Isabella Cervantes, Photo Editor

(https://dailyiowan.com/staff_profile/isabella-cervantes/)

(she/her/hers)

Isabella is the Photo Editor at The Daily Iowan. She is a sophomore at the University of Iowa majoring in journalism and minoring in cinematic...



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