

Eastern Iowa Airport director Marty Lenss teaching first aviation intro course at Coe College

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Eastern Iowa Airport director Marty Lenss teaches an introduction to aviation class at Coe College in January 2025. CREDIT COE COLLEGE

Marty Lenss has a wealth of experience across the aviation spectrum, but he's recently added another entry to his professional profile: Coe College professor.

The director of the Eastern Iowa Airport (CID) is teaching the first introduction to aviation course at Coe College, as the Cedar Rapids school launches its aviation management and flight operations program.

"As you begin your academic journey into aviation, you can't ask for better insight than having the airport director teaching your introductory class," said Coe College Provost Angela Ziskowski.

Mr. Lenss has a wealth of life experience. He was a sworn peace officer in Tulsa, working directly with airport law enforcement. He cleared snow off runways during frigid pre-dawn mornings in Cheyenne. He helped manage the airport noise program in Minneapolis. He embraced business development in Madison and dipped his toe in the lobbying space while in Appleton.

Having a current airport director as an instructor, particularly one with Mr. Lenss' diverse experience and connections, is a valuable experience for Coe students. Personal stories add color to lessons, guest speakers are part of his course plans and the airport itself will be available as a secondary classroom.

Mr. Lenss said he is excited to connect with the next generation of aviation enthusiasts and create a lively classroom environment known for first-hand stories.



“What’s going to be fun is sharing my passion for the industry with students and hopefully playing a role in lighting their spark,” Mr. Lenss said.

The teaching role on campus is one of the next steps in the burgeoning partnership between Coe and the Eastern Iowa Airport. In May 2024, Coe **announced its aviation management and flight operations program**, which includes operating a flight school in partnership with Revv Aviation out of a dedicated hangar at the Eastern Iowa Airport – Coe’s aeronautical field station. This summer, the airport will also host an exclusive internship for a Coe student.

Mr. Lenss has been a constant through the program development process. Over the 10 years he has served as airport director at CID, he’s guided an expansion of commercial routes and of the airport’s physical footprint, which is in the final stages of a \$120 million expansion.

Helping Coe bring its aviation program from concept to reality, and now having an active role in that reality as a professor, is a natural next step for the lifelong aviation enthusiast.

It was a flight to Newfoundland – the first flight for Mr. Lenss – that hooked him. He was flying to visit his sister when he was a teenager, and was fascinated by how quickly a plane could cover the vast amount of land between the Twin Cities and the Canadian province. He took that fascination with him to college, where the intent was to be a pilot, but his interests quickly shifted to airport administration.

That pivot in educational focus started Mr. Lenss down his professional path, which includes a range of roles at a number of different airports across the Midwest. He’s learned remarkable lessons, and as someone living in the industry every day, is eager to pass his knowledge on in the classroom.

“Class will be a lot about careers and career options,” Mr. Lenss said. “There’s so much more in the industry that people aren’t aware of.”

Public safety, cybersecurity, operations, business development, customer service, data management, governance, engineering, mechanics, environmental work and air traffic control are all areas Mr. Lenss will touch on in his intro course at Coe. And, yes, piloting aircraft will also be part of the discussion – the industry is facing a 17,000-pilot gap due to age-mandated retirements and more available routes.

Students at Coe can pursue just an aviation management track, which will prepare them for aviation roles on the ground, or they can pursue aviation management and flight operations, which includes flight school. The intro course is the starting point for both options.

“If you want to be a pilot, it’s never been better,” Mr. Lenss said.

Starting salaries for new commercial pilots are approaching \$90,000, and some airlines employ route management which allows pilots to be home every night as well. For Mr. Lenss, it’s the little steps in the flight school process at the airport he is looking forward to most, especially as he begins to build relationships with aviation students in the classroom.

“I’m excited to see students drive up to the hangar, do their pre-flight with instructors, jump into an aircraft and fly to practice areas and just see the activity change here at the airport,” Mr. Lenss said, adding that he plans to be there with high fives when students complete their first solo flight.

This summer, a Coe student will be able to take an even deeper dive into aviation management as an intern at the [Eastern Iowa Airport](#). This internship will be broad enough to generate direct exposure to the many facets of the airport, but Mr. Lenss said it will also be flexible enough to lean into the student’s specific interests. There will be a capstone project to elevate the internship experience from observational to hands-on.

“It’s important to do something meaningful to get a sense of what the work will be like once they graduate,” Mr. Lenss said.

For right now, the new professor is concentrating on making sure his passion for aviation, and also Eastern Iowa, is apparent and accessible for the students he will interface with on a regular basis. He said it’s powerful to know as airport director can have a role in connecting families and friends with each other and also businesses with the surrounding communities.

Now, it will be just as powerful knowing he is connecting students with a potential long term career.

“The energy is here in our community, and I can’t wait to help bring the education to this space that aligns with what employers are looking for,” Mr. Lenss said. “We hope it spurs additional economic development right here that will put Coe students to work in Eastern Iowa with fantastic employers.”