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Great Lakes takes over soon

Service to begin April 11 in FD

March 23, 2012

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer , Messenger News

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A new era in air travel will take off at Fort Dodge Regional Airport on April 11.

That's the day when Great Lakes Airlines will begin serving the local airport as the replacement for Delta Air Lines.

The new carrier will provide three round trips every weekday to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in Minnesota plus two round trips on Saturdays and Sundays. In Minnesota, travelers will be able to seamlessly transfer to flights on Delta and five other airlines.

The change from Delta to Great Lakes, which has been anticipated since November, was announced Friday.

"We're excited to be there and excited to get things going," said Mary Osborne, a spokeswoman for Great Lakes.

Rhonda Chambers, the airport's director of aviation, said the new airline will provide more flights and additional options for air travelers compared to what is in place today.

"We're looking forward to working with Great Lakes for a smooth transition," she said.

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the start of Great Lakes service will be held in May.

Although the planes flying to and from the local airport will no longer have Delta logos on them, travelers will still be able to book Fort Dodge flights with Delta. That's because Great Lakes and Delta worked together for several years to develop a partnership that will permit seamless travel options for those passengers, according to Chambers.

"The agreement is rather unique because Delta and Great Lakes are completely separate airlines," she said. "We are grateful for the teamwork between Delta and Great Lakes which continues to provide our passengers access to the Delta Air Lines network."

Fort Dodge passengers will also be able to get connecting flights at Minneapolis-St. Paul on American, Continental, Frontier, United and US Airways. The agreements with those airlines will allow passengers to fly out of Fort Dodge on Great Lakes and then continue on one of those carriers without a hassle, Chambers said.

Great Lakes will serve Fort Dodge with 19-seat Beechcraft 1900D turbo prop planes. According to Chambers, those planes move as fast as the larger SAAB turbo prop planes that were the primary

Fort Dodge, IA



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Great Lakes schedule

Here is the Great Lakes Airlines schedule for Fort Dodge, effective April 11.

Monday through Friday

Departures: 6 a.m., 10:15 a.m., 4:35 p.m.

Arrivals: 10:05 a.m., 4:25 p.m., 9:10 p.m.

Saturday

Departures: 6 a.m., 10:15 a.m.

Arrivals: 10:05 a.m., 5:10 p.m.

Sunday

Departures: 6 a.m., 4:35 p.m.

Arrivals: 4:25 p.m., 9:10 p.m.

aircraft on Delta flights, so travel times will remain the same.

All of the flights will be nonstop.

At Minneapolis-St. Paul, the planes will arrive at centrally located Concourse E. Previously, Fort Dodge flights used gates at one end of the airport.

Osborne said a Great Lakes plane will be moved to Fort Dodge on April 10 so that the airline is ready for the 6 a.m. departure the following day.

The airline will have six or seven employees in Fort Dodge, she said. A few of those employees will be former Delta workers, she added.

The transition to a new airline in Fort Dodge began in July 2011, when Delta announced its plan to exit the market. But that airline couldn't leave immediately because it received a federal subsidy through the Essential Air Service program to serve the city. The U.S. Department of Transportation barred Delta from leaving until its replacement was found and ready to take over. The federal agency then sought proposals from airlines interested in serving Fort Dodge with the aid of a subsidy.

In November 2011, the department picked Great Lakes. That airline will receive a \$1,798,693 annual subsidy to serve Fort Dodge.

Great Lakes, based in Cheyenne, Wyo., was established in Spirit Lake in 1977 as Spirit Lake Airways. Two years later, the name was changed to reflect the company's home in the Iowa Great Lakes region. The company moved to its current headquarters in 1999.

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