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Q.C. Air Show May Become A Free Event

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Updated: May 07, 2012 10:32 PM CDT

By Bailey Deitz - [email](#)



It's a major summer event in the area for more than 25 years and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. Now officials of the Quad City Air Show want to make it free to get in.

This announcement comes in the midst of a conflict over money for the air show. Last week KWQC reported that Davenport's Airport Commission wants to nearly triple the rent for the event. The two sides are trying to come to an agreement. Now, while air show officials are fighting a sky high rental increase, they're also focused on raising a lot of money to make future shows a different experience.

"I definitely think in today's economy it would encourage families to go out there and spend time out there," said Sue Wehrle, who has been to past air shows.

You can't beat free for what's been considered one of the best air shows in the country. Between 80,000 and 100,000 visitors usually turn out. Last year at a ticket cost of \$20 for adults and \$6 for children at the gate plus parking fees. With no charge Q.C. Air Show President Ken Hopper hopes to attract up to 200,000 people with their eyes on the sky.

"We've always wanted to make it a free event," said Hopper, "It takes between \$800,000 and \$1 million to put it on, so we came up with an idea a couple years ago. Now we're going to start to push it."

But free won't come without community support. Hopper is calling it the "50-20" initiative where officials will look for 50 local companies, groups, or foundations to contribute \$20,000 each to raise \$1 million. "Our goal is to make it a free event to the community, and it's hard to do that if they're going to keep charging us. That's why the rent thing kind of bugs me," added Hopper.

Currently, the event pays an annual rate of \$9,300. The Airport Commission is increasing that to up to \$25,000. Aldermen who act as liaisons with the Airport Commission say prices haven't been negotiated in years and this debate stems from a contract that needs updating. "The contract in effect right now dates back to 1991. There's never been a new contract in the last 21 years," said Alderman Bill Edmond.

Still, Alderman Edmond hopes the two sides can come to an agreement. So that the show can go on years to come.

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The Quad City Air Show has an economic impact of around \$20 million a year to the area. The city does contribute to the event, using funds from hotel/motel taxes.

Hopper says if they can offer a free admission there will still be charges for VIP packages and corporate chalets. Not only does he hope for more visitors, but that they'll continue to spend while at the show which is set for Labor Day weekend.

There is a work session for city leaders, the Airport Commission, and air show officials on Wednesday night on the rent agreement. That will be following the regular council meeting. If all sides can't come to an agreement there is talk of arbitration.

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