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Sioux County Regional Airport exceeds expectations

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SIoux CENTER—The Sioux County Regional Airport is one of 20 Iowa airports that will receive federal dollars to expand infrastructure.

The airport will receive more than \$123,000, administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation through its Airport Infrastructure Grants program. The funds will be used to acquire land adjacent to the south for future development at its 3153 460th St, Maurice, site just south of the intersection of Highways 10 and 75.

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In its fifth year of operation, the airport is exceeding expectations.

“Such expansion was in the plan and hope for the future, but not this fast,” said Andrew Schreier, owner and president of AirFlair — the company that services the Sioux County Regional Airport. “We thought we spec’d the buildings big enough when we opened, thinking we had some substantial amount of time to grow into those buildings. What we’ve learned since is that there was a lot of need that was unknown at the time. Companies, too, have grown, individuals have grown and a result of that is the airport has grown because there’s more demand for storage of airplanes and usage of the airport.”

Historical project

Regional airport manager Randy Vander Weide, who managed the Sioux Center Municipal Airport 1980-2018 before being named regional airport manager, said what makes the Sioux County Regional Airport unique compared to other regional airports is that it was created through a three-way partnership between the county and the cities of Sioux Center and Orange City.

The \$32 million investment, of which the runway portion was constructed with 90 percent funding provided by the Federal Aviation Administration, opened in November 2018.

The airport boasts a 5,500-foot runway that can serve business jets and has a parallel taxiway. Before this project, the Sioux Center and Orange City airports had constraints that limited usage and aircraft size.

The terminal building, designed largely by Tucket’s Designs of Sioux Center, houses administrative offices for a fixed-base operation that AirFlair calls home. Offices make up about 35 percent of the terminal building; the remaining 65 percent includes public restrooms, a meeting room and a waiting area.



The Sioux County Regional Airport houses an average of 55 planes and is in need of more plane storage space. It was one of 20 Iowa airports that will receive federal dollars to expand infrastructure to meet demand that's larger than anticipated after opening five years ago.

Connected to the terminal building to the north are two 100-by-100-foot hangars. The regional airport also has two T-shaped hangars, one with 14 units for smaller planes and one with 10 units for larger planes. Initially, there were also six private hangars, ranging in size 3,640-12,000 square feet. One housed planes for R&M Spraying owned Bruce Van Beek of Sioux Center, another for Crop Dusters owned by father-son duo Brian and Kameron Gradert of Ireton and a third for Diamond Vogel of Orange City.

A fourth condo structure was also put up five years ago that has three units — one for the dairy construction company that purchased the building, one unit houses Center Fresh Group of Sioux Center and a third unit was available for rent at that time.

In total, 35 airplanes were lined up to use the facility by opening day.

“Within two weeks of the airport opening, all of the T-hangers were already spoken for and had airplanes in them,” Vander Weide said. “It was anticipated we would have ample space for a while in all the other larger hangars, but the airport has surpassed everyone’s expectations.”

Business growth

On site, Optic Air is one business that has built a hangar since the airport opened. Other businesses have added aircraft.

Once the land expansion of the airport is completed this year, three private entities are slated to build hangers, each of which will be 10,000-20,000 square feet based on the user's needs.

AirFlair, too, has been expanding to meet needs. Schreier has been able to add employees and aircraft, including its first mid-sized business jet that arrived in December, bringing the average number of planes the airport houses up to 55.

"The No. 1 way businesses move around the country is commercial and private air charter, so for us to have a facility to even offer the possibility to own or use these size airplanes is a really big deal for Sioux County," Schreier said. "What access businesses have to air travel can impact where a company decides to locate. Often, if they're interested in making an investment in a multimillion dollar airplane, they may move headquarters to be closer to a facility that can house that, but businesses are choosing to stay headquartered in Sioux County while growing elsewhere as well because of what the regional airport has to offer them."



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Schreier's not only increased business capacity with airplanes but also with employees, especially in the flight instruction program, noting that after the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 many people were wanting to go in the airline industry but flight schools became full and more people began to look at rural instruction programs.

“We have the people, the airplanes and the facility to support that training,” he said. “On any given day, we’re averaging 20 students, which is about four to five times higher than it was when we moved here.”

Those students for the two-year program all live within a 25-mile radius of the regional airport and range in age from high school students to those in retirement.

A weather observation station, fueling area and parking lot are also part of the airport, but the latter two are in need of expansion as well due to the airport’s growth.

Economic development

One feature that made it possible for more flights in and out of the regional airport was the installation of MALSR, or medium intensity approach lighting system, which allows planes to land if there’s a half-mile of visibility or more.

“It’s an important tool that allows this airport to be utilized in situations that weren’t possible with the previous two city airports,” Vander Weide said. “At a large number of urban airports you can get lower, but for rural airports a half mile is great and helps keep this airport humming.”

Before the airport was built, Vander Weide and Schreier said they were not aware of just how many businesses were using other airports like Sioux City, Sioux Falls, SD, and Spencer to fly into N’West Iowa.



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“Until you build an airport like this, people can’t come here and utilize the facility and its services so they were going to other places, but in the last three years, we’ve seen a shift,” Scheier said.

“People and businesses are finding out about the airport and its capabilities and they want to come here instead. This is their first phone call. Plan B now is Sioux City or Sioux Falls. The beauty of an airport is that you can get as close to your destination as possible and to see that travel increased dramatically because people — repeat customers and business owners who may not live here but are flying in — because they want to be in the area, that really says something about N’West Iowa.”

The state of Iowa is taking notice, too. The county’s regional airport came in at No. 7 in direct job impacts and annual economic activity from on-airport activity with a value of \$4,236,8000 in the Iowa Department of Transportation in its 2022 General Aviation report.

“When Sioux Center and Orange City built their own separate airports more than 50 years ago, it was a leap of faith and done because both communities thought they needed an airport for economic development,” Vander Weide said. “I’m ecstatic, thrilled about the regional airport carrying that on in bigger and better ways.

“I’m an airplane guy. Sioux Center is where I was born, where I grew up. I started at the Sioux Center airport when I was 19. I saw how aviation was bursting at the seams there for years. I was 100 percent convinced this airport would be a success so seeing the impact the airport can and does have on local businesses, which the vast majority of the public doesn’t see, and seeing the companies grow a lot and use aviation as that tool, it’s just fantastic and, even if I’m not here much longer, I believe this airport will continue to grow that economic impact for the county.”

At a Glance:

Entity: Sioux County Regional Airport

Partners: Sioux Center, Orange City, Sioux County

Manager: Randy Vander Weide of Sioux Center

Fixed-based operation service: AirFlair

FBO owner/president: Andrew Schreier

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