

The Hawk Eye

LOCAL

After 13 years of service, airport director retires

Laigha Anderson The Hawk Eye

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After more than 13 years, the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport will have a new director leading it into 2021.

Mary Beard, who has served as the director of the airport since Nov. 2007, will retire at the end of this year.

"I feel like I have had a great time at the airport," Beard said. "It has been a great time and I am happy to be here."

John Schulz, vice chairman of the airport board, said Beard will be greatly missed, not just by the members of the airport board, but also by the community.

"She does a lot of things that really are a benefit," said Schulz.

Dwight Mulch has spent a lot of time on and off of the airport's board dating back to when SEIRA was still the Burlington Municipal Airport. He said that while airport directors have come and gone, Beard stands out.

"She is a very comprehensive administrator," Mulch said, remarking Beard also is a quick learner. "She can handle a lot of tasks."

As for the greatest asset Beard brought to the airport, Mulch said it is her ability to grasp all of the facets of running an airport.

Over the past 13 years, Beard has overseen a myriad of projects, including the renovation of one of the airport's runways, the planning and coordination of which she considers to be among her biggest accomplishments.

The project, which cost more than \$12 million, resurfaces the 18/36 runway, which last had work on it done in 2005. The federal government paid for the bulk of the project in a grant

that was awarded to the airport last year. However, the airport still was responsible for 10% of the project's funding.

But the project was much more than just laying down some new asphalt. It also included work on the drainage system beneath the runway.

And projects come at a rapid pace. Just last year, Beard oversaw reconstruction of the airport's apron, a sort of parking lot for planes. She also has seen the completion of hangars and a remodel of the terminal.

It's a job that takes a lot of work. On any given day, Beard is communicating with the Federal Aviation Administration, coordinating with airport tenants or working to get things ready for airport board meetings. She compared it to running a small business while still dealing with a tangle of government regulations.

She said the diversity of what she has to do was easily the most challenging part of her daily grind. It's a job that requires a diverse background of skills. All that being said, Beard said the job is a lot of fun and provides many opportunities. It also is a job that allows her to help the community greatly.

It would be hard for Beard to single in on a favorite memory as her favorite thing about her work has been meeting all the people needed to make the airport successful.

SEIRA is funded by the cities of Burlington and West Burlington, as well as Des Moines County. It is one of only a handful of airports in Iowa that offers commercial flights, and the only one to do so in southeast Iowa, with the next closest commercial airport being in Cedar Rapids.

The airport is a part of the essential air service and provides daily flights to Chicago's O'Hare as well as to Saint Louis and Minneapolis through Air Choice One, a company that specializes in providing essential air service.

"It is essential to attract new business to a town like this," Schulz said.

In her retirement, Beard wants to spend time traveling with her husband, Doug, who retired from the Burlington Police Department a few years ago.