



Briefings

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Panel gives tips on community relations, promotion

The 2015 Minnesota Airports Conference, held in St. Cloud in April, featured a panel discussion with experienced local government and airport leaders who have successfully promoted the importance of their airport to their communities and local units of government. Panel members were Dave Kleis, mayor of St. Cloud; Bud Stone, president and CEO of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce; Jean Harr, Dean of the College of Education for Minnesota State University, Mankato; and Mark Priglmeier, general aviation (GA) pilot and staff, St. Cloud Regional Airport. Session moderator was St. Cloud airport manager Bill Towle.

Kleis welcomed attendees and kicked off the session by emphasizing the role St. Cloud's airport has played in connecting the city to the rest of the state, country, and global economy. Because air transportation has been so important to the local economy, Kleis said St. Cloud has committed effort and resources to help ensure its success. For example, the airport has undergone recent expansion and has spent a long time getting air service. St. Cloud's challenges with maintaining air service have been felt by the entire community, and it has worked with the local business community, chamber, and state and federal congressmen in a collaborative efforts, he said, including efforts to provide incentives to the airlines and a local gas tax to support the airport.

Bud Stone explained that the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce is atypical



MSU Mankato's aviation program is the biggest user of Mankato Regional Airport.

in that it is a public policy chamber versus a social chamber. In 1944, Mesaba Airlines was formed near Grand Rapids, and the airline was the key airport user. (Mesaba ceased operations in January 2012, when all aircraft and personnel were transitioned to Pinnacle Airlines.) Grand Rapids has not had commercial service since 2004, but the airport is still an important part of the community's economic activity, used by industries such as Blandin Paper and many local residents. Its economic future is based on new companies and new technologies locating in the community, which is influenced by the presence of a vital airport.

Jean Harr said that Minnesota State University, Mankato's aviation program was scheduled to close in 2009, but the strong relationship between the city, airport, and university prevented that from happening. Several community members worked together and met with the University's president to stress the value of the program,

and the president changed his decision.

There was a short-term (three-year) investment by members of the community, and it took some effort to rebuild the program, but the success of these efforts led to the aviation program and flight school becoming the biggest users of the airport. The City of Mankato also contributed to the airport's success by investing in its infrastructure. Harr noted that the aviation program now has 50 enrolled students and an onsite jet simulator, and it recently hosted an accreditation visit. All partners are marketing heavily to increase student enrollment and the program's success, she added.

Mark Priglmeier concluded the session by sharing a GA pilot's prospective. It's important to give people a reason to fly by building relationships with other airports and their flying communities, facilitating tours of the airport and the tower, and building relationships with resorts, restaurants, and special places of interest, he said.

An airport's story: Eveleth–Virginia Municipal Airport

Eveleth–Virginia Municipal Airport is located near the northeastern Minnesota town of Eveleth, on the Mesabi Iron Range. Covering about 500 acres, the publicly owned airport is operated by the Eveleth–Virginia Airport Authority.

The airport began as an airstrip in the early 1940s, with Eveleth as the primary owner. After the nearby town of Virginia closed its airport in the late 1940s, it partnered with Eveleth to form the Eveleth–Virginia Municipal Airport, which was dedicated in July 1952. The airport has two runways—Runway 9/27 (asphalt) and Runway 14/32 (turf).

Gary Ulman has been the airport manager for more than 15 years, first joining the airport as the assistant manager in 1996, then becoming the full-time manager in 2000. Ulman started working with the airport's current fixed-based operator (FBO), Taconite Aviation, in May 1979.

Annual operations are estimated at around

12,000, Ulman says. Airport users include Bemidji Aviation, which contracts with UPS for freight hauling; Taconite Aviation, which provides aircraft for security operations during mine blasting; local pilots who use the airport for business and recreational purposes; Spectrum Health Services, which flies in to the airport for meetings; and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which uses the airport to refuel during animal surveys. Other contractors also use the airport for meetings and shuttling employees.

The Eveleth airport was in the national news in October 2002, when U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone, along with seven others, died in a plane crash two miles away from the airport while attempting to execute an approach to Runway 27. Investigators for the NTSB determined the cause as pilot error.

Ulman says the best part of his job is flying, and the second-best is encouraging others to fly. During his time at the airport, he's seen a



number of changes, including the closure of runway 5/23 and then its conversion to a turf strip, the complete reconstruction of Runway 9/27, construction of a new terminal/hangar building, and the purchase of properties for clear zones. Two hangars were destroyed by fire and then rebuilt. And the township road was finally vacated after years of property purchasing, allowing for the safe departure

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and approach to runway 14/32.

Over the years Ulman has also noticed fewer transient aircraft, fewer requests for charters, and fewer “airport bums”—people just hanging out at the airport, he says.

Although Ulman counts its pilots and full-service FBO as the airport’s greatest assets, it does face some pressing needs for hangar space, ramp pavement rehabilitation, and storm-drain rehabilitation.

This past April, the airport received a Project of the Year award in the category of Intermediate General Aviation from the Minnesota Council of Airports at the annual Minnesota Airports Conference for its rehabilitation of Runways 9/27 and 14/32 and relocation of Taxiways A, B, and C. Ulman explained that zoning and obstructions to the west side of the airport necessitated shifting the ends of runways 14/32 and 9/27. However, Runway 14/32 Zone A overlaid private property that contained homes. After years of meetings and an unsuccessful attempt to purchase property, the airport authority concluded that the solution was to shorten 14/32 and change it to turf. The FAA said that while it would not support the crosswind runway in its paved form, it would provide funding for a turf crosswind runway. Now Zone A for runway 14 is on airport property. Additionally, old runway 9/27 had a displaced threshold with a taxi lane up to the threshold in line with the runway centerline. That pavement was removed and the threshold was moved further to the east for obstructions (trees) on the approach to runway 9. Taxiway B was totally replaced in a different location; it now has a 90-degree entry from the ramp and a 90-degree entry from runway 9. A U-shaped taxiway on the north side at the approach end of runway 27 has replaced a run-up pad, and the old runway was milled and relayed in place, graded, and rolled. The asphalt mix used taconite tailings/aggregate as the course materials. Finally, new runway lights, wiring, control power units, and PAPI lights were installed.

FAA update at airport conference

The 2015 Minnesota Airports Conference, held in St. Cloud in April, drew about 200 attendees from throughout the state. In one session, Barry Cooper, regional administrator for the Great Lakes Region of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), discussed FAA initiatives likely to affect airports and pilots across the nation. This includes legislation and the pending FAA reauthorization. He also covered the privatization of the Air Traffic Control System, which will serve as a roadmap for the FAA for the next several years.

The FAA’s strategic initiatives, he said, are to make aviation safer and smarter, deliver benefits through technology and infrastructure, enhance global leadership, and empower and innovate with the FAA’s people. NextGen (Next Generation Air Transportation System) is an FAA program to modernize today’s national airspace system through a series of initiatives designed to make the airspace system more efficient. This includes a move from a ground-based system to satellite-based and digital technology, Cooper explained. NextGen is the largest infrastructure project in US history, he added. The top priorities for the system include performance-based navigation, multiple runway operations, surface operations, and data communications. Congress will determine which is most important and build it into reauthorization, Cooper added.

Regarding unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), Cooper said that up until recently, UAS have been used only by hobbyists. The reauthorization bill, however, asked that the FAA incorporate UAS into the civilian airspace system by 2015. The FAA has established six test sites around the country to serve as labs to inform a process for integrating UAS into the national airspace, Cooper said.

Congratulations to these award-winning airports!

At the 2015 Minnesota Airports Conference, the following airports received Project of the Year awards from the Minnesota Council of Airports in the categories noted:

- Key General Aviation: Southwest Minnesota Regional Airport, Marshall–Ryan Field, for its east building area—Marshall Airpark
- Key General Aviation: Park Rapids Regional Airport–Konshok Field, for Runway 18/36 paving and lighting
- Intermediate General Aviation: Glencoe Municipal Airport–Pershau Field, for Runway 13/31 rehabilitation and LED lighting improvements
- Intermediate General Aviation: Eveleth–Virginia Municipal Airport, for Runway 9/27 and 14/32 rehabilitation and Taxiway A, B, and C relocation
- Business Development/Non-Aeronautical: Range Regional Airport, Hibbing, for its DMR electronics facility
- Business Development/Non-Aeronautical: Morris Municipal Airport–Schmidt Field, for construction of an 8,800 sq. ft. fixed-base operator hangar



Range Regional Airport, Hibbing

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Briefings is published quarterly in print and online. Please direct comments to:
 Amy Friebe, Briefings Editor
 Mindy Carlson, AirTAP Manager
 Jim Grothaus, AirTAP Director

Designer: Angela Kronebusch
 Contributing writer: Ann Johnson

Center for Transportation Studies
 University of Minnesota
 511 Washington Avenue S.E.
 Minneapolis, MN 55455
 Phone: 612-626-1077
 E-mail: groth020@umn.edu
 Web: www.airtap.umn.edu

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Airport Technical Assistance Program
 University of Minnesota
 200 Transportation and Safety Building
 511 Washington Avenue S.E.
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