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Ready for takeoff

Event marks 5 years of Jet Air, new taxiways and flight instructor.

By MICHAEL ANDERSON
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Harrel Timmons glanced at his watch Friday while chatting in front of a Cessna Citation II parked in a hangar at the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport.

Anxious to depart for a business trip, the Jet Air president indicated he would be flying in the next 20 minutes.

"We call them time machines," he said, commenting on how in a matter of hours, the company's charter pilots can ferry passengers from one side of the nation to the other and be back in time for supper.

With his feet on the ground a few more minutes, Timmons, at least six other Jet Air employees and a crowd of airport, city and county officials finished their refreshments during a gathering to celebrate recent improvements to the airport and mark Jet Air's fifth year in Burlington.

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John Lovretta/The Hawk Eye Harrel Timmons of Galesburg, Ill., president of Jet Air, left, talks with Dan Wiedemeier, Hans Trousil and Bob Beck on Friday during an open house and ribbon-cutting celebrating the official opening of new taxiways, Jet Air's five years in Burlington and a new full-time flight instructor at the relatively new hangar at the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport. The men were gathered around a Cessna 172 Skyhawk II, a training plane used by Jet Air.



John Lovretta/The Hawk Eye Tom Schnirring of Burlington, an aviation enthusiast, looks into the cockpit of a Cessna Citation II, during an open house and ribbon-cutting at the relatively new hangar at the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport.

"It's really to say thank you to the public entities that helped us fund this," said Dan Wiedemeier, a member of the airport's board of directors.

Much of Friday's celebration focused on recent improvements at the airport, most notably the completion of an extensive \$1 million renovation of the airport's southernmost concrete taxiway. But Wiedemeier also pointed out four electric doors were installed on its hangars over the summer.

As for Jet Air, Timmons said Burlington has treated the aviation company well. In return, the company offers a variety of aviation services to the region, Nef Moya said.

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Originally from Spain, Moya and his girlfriend, Jordan DiGrazia, moved to the area to work as charter pilots and flight instructors with Jet Air after meeting at Southern Illinois University, where they were in the school's aviation program.

Moya, a part-time pilot, regularly flies charter flights for business personnel visiting the area but pointed out his company also offers medical transport services.

Apart from offering flying lessons, Jet Air also sells airplanes around the world and rents out its aircraft for local photographers to snap aerial pictures of the region's topography.

The company has offices in Burlington and Iowa City but is headquartered in Galesburg, Ill. Timmons said most of the company's business comes from Iowa City, where the airline serves medical professionals and high-salaried University of Iowa passengers.

Still, Timmons said Iowa City's airport is locked in by its tight urban configuration and has little room for expansion. Galesburg's facilities are a little better, but when it comes to infrastructure, Burlington's airport has plenty of room to expand, and is the best in comparison.

"We think there's a great potential here," Timmons said. "We think Burlington is in growth mode."

Wiedemeier agreed. He noted the airport has experienced significant growth in recent years, with passenger flights at nearly 85 percent capacity.

The relatively new hangar in which the open house was held was constructed two years ago for about \$375,000, using Iowa Department of Transportation funds. In addition, the airport's runways have been resurfaced in recent years.

"Burlington is very fortunate to have this facility here," said Charles Walsh, the airport board chairman.

Airport Director Mary Beard agreed, noting the incursion of large-scale development projects, like Orascom's fertilizer plant in Wever, already has affected traffic at the airport.

"We expect to see growth at the airport from all the economic development coming to the region," Beard said, noting U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, flew in Thursday, and DuPont chairwoman and CEO Ellen Kullman came through the airport in late September to celebrate the 75-year-long presence of her company in Fort Madison.

"A lot of people don't realize how many corporations fly in and use the airport," said Jet Air Vice President Phillip Wolford. "The economic impact of the airport is phenomenal."



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