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A Closer Look: Kevin Foley

Executive director and general manager, Des Moines International Airport

BY [KYLE OPPENHUIZEN](#), Staff Writer

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Kevin Foley became executive director of Des Moines International Airport in February. He took over for Don Smithey, who is credited with improving the health of the airport and bringing in low-fare carrier Southwest Airlines Co. Foley has worked at the airport for about 5 1/2 years and most recently served as the airport's assistant executive director and general manager, where he had the opportunity to learn from Smithey. Foley spent time as an associate professor of aviation at the University of Dubuque and held a number of positions at Dubuque Regional Airport. He's also a pilot who flew corporate airplanes. Before getting into aviation, he and his wife farmed in Belle Plaine. Foley's appointment is one in a series of changes at the airport. In March, a consulting company report recommended a site plan for a new terminal.



Kevin Foley

Age: 56

Family: Foley and his wife, Gerri, have two grown children, Ryan and Alicia

Education: Bachelor's degree in aviation management and an M.B.A. from the University of Dubuque

Hometown: Belle Plain, Iowa

What are your goals with this position?

The course has been set. The board has set the course. Continue to strive for enhanced airline service. That enhanced service, of course, would generate competition and hopefully keep our fares as low as possible. Nationally, our fares have been creeping up a little bit. And that's across the board, so we've seen our fares go up a little bit in Des Moines from what they were a year ago, but fuel basically drives that. Then (the site study plan) really sets the course for the next 10 to 15 years as to what this job will entail. The day-to-day operations are really handled by the three directors who report to the executive director. This position is about long-term planning and about keeping us on the course that the board has set.

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Yes, it is. Southwest is the price leader here in Des Moines. They're the ones who have brought the fares down. And when the fares go down, the enplanements start to go up, traffic starts going up. So there is demand for other destinations, possibly between Des Moines and St. Louis, or even another Las Vegas flight. So I do anticipate additional flights on Southwest. And Don was gracious enough to take me down and introduce me to some of the contacts at Southwest. Don is the reason Southwest is in Des Moines. He has a long-term relationship with them. So we're going down to meet and greet and shake hands in a one-on-one basis in April. Southwest has not indicated anything at this point, but I'm hoping.

How do you follow Don Smithey?

His are big footsteps. The two things that Don was instrumental in, one was bringing in Southwest. But more importantly, he helped direct and make this airport an authority. That transition from a city department to an airport authority continues today and I suspect will continue for a number of years into the future.

They are a big set of shoes to follow and a big set of shoes to fill. Don and I had a close working relationship. I usually agreed with the course, but if I didn't, I told him. And occasionally could change his mind.

What have you learned about this market coming into this job?

The airport is behind some of the airports surrounding us. Behind in terminal development, in airport development, for a number of reasons. ... Many airports are on their second, possibly even third terminal. We're still in the 1948 terminal that was originally built. Now, it looks pretty good. It's been pretty well-maintained. Growthwise, it's outdated. It's outlived its usefulness in the way it's laid out. And when you start connecting systems and adding on and adding on, it just doesn't function well. So when I say we're behind, those are the types of things I'm talking about.

I do think the market as far as the airport is concerned is still developing and there's room for growth here. At some point, the growth that we are experiencing today will start to slow down. I don't know where that point is, and I don't think anybody else does for sure. How did you get involved in aviation?

While I was farming, I was a licensed applicator of pesticides. So insecticides or herbicides, I would spray them with the ground rig. And once the crops got too large to run the ground equipment, we would bring in aerial applicators. I just thought that looked like so much fun. So initially that's what I went back to school to do: become a crop duster. And I was kind of going through some training and got to thinking about it. At the time, the life expectancy wasn't real great for those types of operations, and I had two small children. So I just stayed over on the business side of aviation, got all my certificates, and did end up flying for corporate. But I kind of always kept a foot in on the management side of things.

What do you do for fun?

I used to fly for fun. I don't since I've been in Des Moines. I do enjoy flying. My family is grown, but still we travel. My daughter lives in Detroit and my son is in the Quad Cities, so on weekends, we maybe catch the flight to Detroit, go see my daughter. Family is important.

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