

Carver Aero goal: 'More people, more planes'

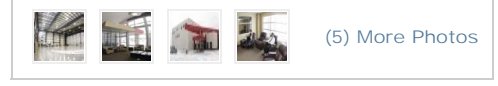
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Jennifer DeWitt | Posted: Tuesday, January 18, 2011 2:00 am | (3) Comments



This new 20,000-square-foot hangar is part of the recent improvements to the Davenport Municipal Airport. Carver Aero, the fix-based operator at the airport, hopes those improvements bring in more business. (Larry Fisher/QUAD-CITY TIMES)



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With the construction dust and crews gone, Carver Aero is enjoying a new, modern terminal building that it designed to better serve its customers but also to elevate the Davenport Municipal Airport's image.

Carver Aero, the fixed-based operator at the city-owned airport since 1990, built the \$3 million facility to house its own growing business. But city leaders have high hopes for the potential the project holds in the region's efforts to promote business growth.

"We were out of room. We didn't have the room to accommodate our guests," said Sandra Barrett, Carver Aero's operations manager, who was active in the building's planning. "There were so many details. A lot of hours went into this — a lot of planning and preparation."

The result, she said, is a building worthy of its growing customer base.

"The old building was just not adequate enough for the level of customer we presently have," she said, adding that the facility will lead the community "to utilize the airport as a business tool more."

The 7,460-square-foot terminal, situated prominently at the end of the entrance road, replaces Carver Aero's more humble, aging terminal and hangar. The company now uses that structure for storage and hangar space.

In addition, the airport demolished a circa-1950 terminal to make way for the new terminal. The new project also included an attached, 20,000-square-foot hangar that will allow Carver Aero to store more and larger aircraft.

"The image that our airport now portrays from what it did last year is a huge difference," said Jeremy Keating,

airport manager at the city of Davenport facility at

9230 N. Harrison St. "With the new facility, now they can compete with Elliott Aviation (at the Quad-City International Airport) and other fixed-based operators in the area."

"If you have a rundown airport that doesn't look very good and rundown buildings, it doesn't make your community look good," he said, adding that the airport often serves as the community's front door.

Not as high profile as Quad-City International — the area's hub for commercial air traffic — the

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Davenport airport is the hub for many private planes. The new terminal also is the headquarters for Carver Aero's growing charter business, its Flight Ground School and its maintenance services.

The company not only has its own planes to maintain but provides services to about 200 planes a year from as small as a single-engine Cessna 150 to a large jet such as a Citation XLS. Barrett said Carver Aero mechanics also are called more than 325 times a year to service planes at Quad-City International. Carver Aero also has a facility at the Muscatine Municipal Airport. In all, the company employs 55 people between the two locations — including 15 pilots and six mechanics.

With the new facility, Barrett said they expect "more people, more planes and more customers."

Ryan Companies, Davenport, was both the architect and the contractor on the building project.

Barrett said Carver Aero moved into its new space Nov. 1.

"We're operational, but we're still settling into our new space. Anybody who has moved a business while still operating the business understands."

The new terminal has a spacious lobby that provides a clear view of the airfield out a wall of windows. One of the new amenities is a pilots' lounge with recliner seating, refreshments, a large-screen television and the same view of the airfield. Adjacent to the lounge are two private sleeping rooms.

A large conference room, where the airport commission meets, is available for community meetings.

"We expect during campaign season a lot of people will be using this," Barrett said during a tour. The airport has long been a regular stop for politicians on the national and state campaign trail.

Other amenities include a small conference room, a business center for pilots or other customers, a flight plan room, a testing center for student pilots, shower facilities and office space for Carver Aero and its pilots and staff.

"Most of this building is devoted to our customers," she added.

Carver Aero, headed by partners Roy Carver Jr. and Rodney Blackwell, first approached the City of Davenport about three years ago with a plan for modernizing the aging airport. Construction began last spring with demolition of old 8,000-square-foot terminal.

Keating, who arrived in Davenport as ground was broken on the terminal project, said the city's role included repaving a new entrance road and parking lots and installing new street lighting. The \$600,000 road project was paid out of the city's capital improvement budget. The city also is building six new individual hangars to expand capacity.

"Now with the new building, it definitely opens up opportunities not only for Carver Aero but for the city," said Keating, whose role includes helping recruit more development around the airport. "We're doing this (project) for the community. We want more jobs to locate here, more bigger companies to locate here."

The city also is working on plans to extend the airport's runway from 5,511 feet to 7,000 feet. The additional length, he said, will allow the airport to accommodate larger corporate aircraft and more jet traffic.

"Right now, the jets can be affected by the weather ... due to the runway length," he said, adding that the result is larger aircraft sometimes are diverted to Quad-City International.

Keating is collecting letters of support from area companies in its pursuit of a grant to help finance the costly project. The work, which would include land acquisition, environmental studies and the runway, could cost \$10 million to \$15 million, he said. "Just the concrete is \$3 million to \$4 million. But we don't own enough land right now to do it."

The city also is trying to get funding for new signage at the airport.

"That's another image-selling thing," he said.

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





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