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- **Local News**
- Local Photos
- News Brief
- Business
- Obituaries
- Lifestyle
- Education
- From Our Files
- News of record
- Iowa News
- National News
- International News
- Religion
- SUBMIT News
- Closings and delays

Flying high

A 49 percent increase in local air travel has things looking up at FD Regional

December 19, 2010

By HANS MADSEN, Messenger staff writer

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The departing afternoon Delta Air Lines flight at the Fort Dodge Regional Airport created a situation inside the terminal that many would not associate with an airport in a community the size of Fort Dodge.

Almost all the seats in the terminal were taken by those waiting to board and those waiting for arrivals.

This is a reflection of the trend that Rhonda Chambers, director of aviation, has been observing since June.

"The past six months have been incredible," she said. "Overall, we're up 49 percent - and that's without December."

She said the increase in passengers using the airport is due to the changes Delta made. Among them, more desirable arrival and departure times along with a reduction to two flights a day and the elimination of the stop in Mason City.

That flight is now directly to and from Minneapolis.

Chambers appreciates what Delta did.

"They took a risk," she said.

While the numbers for December are not in yet, she said she expects it to be have been equally busy.

Nationally, the 2010 trend is for an increase in holiday travel compared to last year. AAA said it expects a 3.1 percent increase during the Christmas-to-New Year's period. It also projected that 2.8 million people would travel by air.

Gidel Dawson was catching the flight Saturday to eventually take her back to Arizona and school. She's a frequent traveler, she said. She goes somewhere every holiday. Eliminating the Mason City stop wasn't too important to her.

"I like traveling and airports," she said.

Her grandmother, Harriet Gidel, of Rockwell City, said she visits the Fort Dodge terminal often, frequently to welcome her granddaughter for a visit. She does occasionally fly from there.

"I do for graduations," she said as she patted her granddaughter on the shoulder and broke into a proud smile.

Sondra Hickman, of Phoenix, Ariz., was going home after spending some time with her mom, Carolyn Poppen, of Manson.

"It's much more convenient," she said of the new schedule. "I like the flight times; they work well for Phoenix."

Fort Dodge, IA



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Saturday's departure would get her to her front door at about 8 p.m.

"I have some evening left when I get home," she said.

She also had some time before leaving to enjoy a bit of Iowa.

"We had time to go uptown and have a pork tenderloin," she said.

"It's important."

Allen Rimer, of Vancouver, and Somali Smith, of Birmingham, Ala., are both Iowa Central Community College students. They were departing for family holidays.

"I love flying out of here," Rimer said. "It's convenient."

Smith cited another advantage.

"It's cozy," he said. "You won't get lost."

While the news from the airport is good, for local travel agents, it's a little of both.

Staci Miller, a travel agent at Travel and Transport Vacations in Fort Dodge, said that, overall, bookings were down a little from last year but up compared to the summer. She cites the economy and believes that people are not traveling as much.

Her good news: her bookings were up a bit.

Sally Paine Souder, of Eagle Grove, went to the airport Saturday to pick up her husband Robert. Along to greet him, dressed in her best Santa dress, was the family dog, Ruby, a blue heeler mix.

They both like using the airport.

"It's just right," she said.

Ruby wagged her tail.

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