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Letter: General aviation beneficial to Ames

By Drew Kamp, Director of Business Retention and Expansion at the Ames Chamber of Commerce
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Iowa State Daily logo

With a growing network of researchers, entrepreneurs and educators, Ames is quickly becoming an innovation center in the Midwest. Due to the continued growth of the ISU Research Park, exciting collaborations have helped fuel startups and small businesses across our area.

Since its completion in 1989, the park has doubled in size from 200 to 400 acres. Today, it provides 2,050 jobs to the area with a projected growth of 6,000 jobs over the next ten years. A central part of this success is Ames Municipal Airport and our community's shared commitment to its modernization.

The growth of our airport in the last few decades is a perfect example of the value general aviation and local airports can have in creating prosperous communities.

When it was first approved in 1943, it was half the size it is now, with two turf runways and not a lot of resources for incoming aircraft. With the completion of the multi-phased Ames Municipal Airport Modernization Project in 2017, our community fully committed to the airport with the unveiling of a new terminal, airport hangar and the fixed base operator, Central Iowa Air Service.

The \$4.4 million investment was the result of a community-wide public-private partnership led by Iowa State, the city of Ames, the Ames Economic Development Commission and leaders in the Ames business community. Together, we have transformed our city to a regional hub for those who rely on general aviation; attracting everyone from college basketball teams to tech startups.

For years, Ames faced barriers because so many only relied on the Des Moines International Airport as a hub to move goods and connect with nearby stakeholders. But now, Ames municipal is our city's front door.

We continue to attract new businesses into the area. With plans to extend the runway and expand our operations, we have sent the message to job producers across the country that we are willing to invest in them.

Danfoss and Renewable Energy Group (REG) are prime examples of the airport's business development impact. As a global engineering company and the largest private sector employer in the city, Danfoss has been eager to setup shop in Ames, where they have access to a full service general aviation airport that can help them better connect with employees and stakeholders.

Similarly, REG knows the value of the airport to reach faraway markets for distribution and logistics. Since 2007, they have made Ames their U.S. headquarters because our city gives them access to the airways where they can easily connect with their regional offices, operational facilities and terminal locations.

However, it is not just private businesses that use the airport.

With an Iowa National Guard base in Boone, the airport hosts military aircraft during emergency response trainings. When major floods occur like the flash floods in 2010, the Iowa State Troopers use the airport for aerial surveillance, which helps track the flooding and develop an emergency preparedness plan.

Our airport also bolsters tourism, as evidenced by the American Barnstormers Tour in 2010, which plan to return this summer for the 2018 tour. The airport has even assisted the Iowa State basketball team, ensuring that their travel needs are met and the team is taken care of.

As the director of business retention and expansion, I see every day the value general aviation has had on our local economy and way of life. The diverse sectors, people and uses of our general aviation airport continue to grow, and I am proud to be a part of it.

When most people think of transportation, trains, highways and large commercial airports come to mind, but it is our small airports that make the difference for our local infrastructure and community.

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