

Marshalltown Airport sees increase in usage, maintains facility after renovations

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - The Marshalltown Airport is located at 2651 170th St. about four miles north of town just off of Highway 14. Major renovations have been completed at the facility within the last few years.

Today is National Aviation Day, a recognition assigned by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1939 in honor of the birthday of Orville Wright. It is a day to recognize human flight, progress and innovations in the aviation industry.

Although it may not boast the daily traffic of O'Hare or LAX, the Marshalltown Airport has seen plenty of progress in recent years. Since the new \$3.7 million hangar and terminal was opened in April 2023, the airport has been able to open its runways to larger aircrafts. Marshalltown Aviation President and Co-owner Stephen Valbracht said corporations are now able to utilize the facility.



"We are servicing airplanes we were not able to before," he said. "The airport is the first impression a lot of people have of the city, and it has improved. It's great seeing people's faces are a little surprised (that) Marshalltown is represented so well by the airport."

The new hangar is the primary reason for the activity. According to Valbracht, larger corporations did not use the airport before the renovations because the hangar was too

small. Many want to ensure their corporate jets are safe inside hangars. The year-old 100'x200' hangar hosts a 28'x100' door.

“The hangar has opened Marshalltown for use all year round,” he said. “It is exciting. I have seen company airplanes come to Marshalltown that would not have come otherwise, and it’s all because we needed a taller hangar door.”



Valbracht is not alone in his aviation activities. He has seen more high school students working on their flight ratings.

“They are leaving high school with private licenses and are equipped for an aviation career,” he said. “They are doing that in Marshalltown. It is fun to watch them do that and see the local education.”

If more youth become interested in careers in aviation, it will help the current need the industry has for pilots. Boeing estimates that 649,000 new pilots will be needed during the next 20 years and there will be a shortage of 32,000 in 2032.

“We are in desperate need for pilots,” Valbracht said.

He is also concerned about a looming shortage of aviation mechanics, even though he does not need any at the moment. To keep pace with the growing demand for flights, the industry needs to fill 12,000 mechanic positions each year. The number of people going to school for aviation mechanics is not enough to cover the number who are retiring.

“Fewer people go into aviation maintenance, especially general aviation,” Valbracht said. “A general aviation mechanic can work on 10 to 20 models in a given year. A lot of kids only want to work on one model. Finding someone to work in general aviation is difficult.”

Fortunately, he said Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids has added an aviation maintenance technology program. The two-year program will provide graduates with the airframe and powerplant (A&P) certifications the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires for work on airplanes.

“I encourage anyone to look at aviation because there are opportunities,” Valbracht said.

The FAA is not only involved in allowing pilots to fly or A&P mechanics to work on craft the Marshalltown Airport. He said officials with the federal agency will visit the facility every six months for inspections. The Iowa Department of Transportation officials will visit to inspect the landing strip.

“The state will let us know things such as if trees are too tall,” Valbracht said. “The FAA inspectors we look at as partners because they make sure we are operating a safe business and airplanes. They give us a chance to learn.”

With things going well at the Marshalltown Airport, it was difficult for him to think of the biggest challenge. Valbracht said it might be balancing the level of service with the cost to the citizens.

“Anything we do is to benefit the citizens of Marshalltown,” he said. “It is their airport, and we do what is best for the taxpayer. We are a safe and effective airport while maintaining economic responsibility, which is our biggest role.”

There are also no more changes in the immediate future.

“We went through a big one, and in the mode of maintaining what we have while providing good service,” Valbracht said. “We hope to have an event and invite the community. We don’t know when or what, yet.”

The airport is located at 2651 170th Street about four miles north of the city limits just off of Highway 14.

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