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Airport continues to meet needs

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By Randy M. Cauthron Managing Editor

Air service remains viable piece of regional economy



Maintenance, fuel and customer service.

Those three pieces of the air transportation business keep the Spencer Municipal Airport in northwest Spencer a viable part of the regional economy according to Gayle Brandt with Leading Edge Aviation.

Leading Edge Aviation serves as the management operation at the regional air site, and Brandt maintained that despite the lack of a commercial air service, Spencer's airfield is important to area residents and visitors.

"Right now the essential air service dollars (for commercial air traffic), we're not eligible for because of our milage proximity to a major hub city, that being Sioux Falls. Regional airline service in and out of Spencer is not something we're looking at this time. We would need some kind of subsidization to make it work in a community this size," Brandt said. "But, we have good activity out here with our general traffic."

At the present time, all of the airports T-hangars are full.

The three hangars on-site, designed to house smaller single-engine aircraft, offer a total of 29 spaces.

"Oftentimes through the summer, we have them full," Brandt said. "People with lake homes will often hangar here. But we usually have some spaces this time of year. Currently we have them full, which is great.

"If we have a continued demand for the T-hangars, like a waiting list, the board would consider building another. That's the point I would like to get to, adding another T-hangar."

The airport also recently added a new prop plane to its hangar, something Brandt suggested will create service needs.

"We now have a fifth turbo prop based in Spencer and one jet based in Spencer. That brings that much more additional activity, fuel flowage, and maintenance needs."

Two private air service operations, Spencer Avionics and CAMM Air continue to bring in business from outside the area.

"Both of the businesses are just thriving as well. I don't think people recognize how much traffic comes through here. CAMM Air is bringing in business from a distance," Brandt said.

She also noted the stop-and-fuel traffic that the airport gets. She chalks that up to



The Spencer Municipal Airport, surrounded by fields of snow in northwest Spencer, continues to see to the needs of regional clients as well as those stopping for service and fueling

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competitive pricing in fuel and customer service.

"Traffic has been good. It's not as high as we've seen in past years," Brandt said.

Following a recent high of 187 gallons in 2007, fuel flow dropped off to 147 in 2008, and 144 in 2009.

"We should exceed that this year. At least the numbers are going back up, that's good to see," Brandt said.

Of the 187 high in 2007, Brandt explained, "We saw a lot of jet traffic and a lot of ag spraying this year. July and August we had huge jet fuel sales that year."

One client, who flies customers from Idaho to New Jersey, makes the Spencer stop a regular part of his travel plan.

"He can't fly non-stop and we've made a good relationship with him. It's worked out well. We work with him on fuel pricing and it's an easy airport to fly in and out of," Brandt said, addressing the airport's focus on creating regular customers by enhancing service.

"We see a lot of those types of corporate flights. Fuel pricing is all over the board. They're looking and shopping for the best prices. We're very competitive," Brandt said. "We make those relationships and they pop in and out."

At the present time, the only available office space on-site is the former Great Lakes Airlines offices. FEMA had been renting the offices for a team of 35 employees to work out of. Originally the space had been rented by FEMA for two months, but was extended to 90 days. The agency moved out Dec. 15, leaving the space open again.

Maurer Manufacturing is currently renting hangar space for storage, and General Traffic Controls has been operating out of a hangar at the airport since a fire destroyed its building on Highway 71, south of Spencer in February. Brandt said she anticipates the GTC remaining at the airport until May 2011 when the business moves to its rebuilt operations facility.

Superior Lubrication is also operating out of one of the bays at the airport.

Coming off a holiday weekend where snow shut down some of the major airports on the East Coast, Brandt said weather has not been an issue locally this season.

"We've had some snow but it hasn't been anything compared to what we've had last year," Brandt said. "We've been able to keep the airport open without any snow delays."

The airport is looking at a pair of major projects coming up, beginning with a vertical infrastructure project which will conclude roof repairs on a hangar this summer, and a runway light project on the north-south runway.

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needs. A pair of on-site airline operations, CAMM Air (Top) and Spencer Avionics (Bottom), also bring aircraft -- both local and afar -- to town to take advantage of skilled services.

(Photos by Randy M. Cauthron)

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