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FEATURED

Vander Weide still soaring after 38 years

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Randy Vander Weide, who has been the Sioux Center Municipal Airport manager for 38 years, will be moving along with the equipment and the planes to the new Sioux County Regional Airport opening this month. A ribbon cutting is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 14.

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SIOUX CENTER—The opening of the new Sioux County Regional Airport means the closure of the Sioux Center Municipal Airport.

One constant will be airport manager Randy Vander Weide, who will continue in his position at the new facility.

“I still get some comments from people, ‘Why are they doing this?’” Vander Weide said. “It’s a great visionary step by the people on that board for the entire region. It’s visionary for the next 40 to 50 years.”

He has served as the Sioux Center Municipal Airport manager, Vander Weide said, “Since 1980. Forever.”

“I had been working here in high school,” he said. “Then the prior manager moved on and so I just thought I would apply.”

Vander Weide was not one of those kids who looked up into the sky watching the planes from a distance and started to dream, but said getting into aviation was more of a way for him to make money.

A Sioux Center native, he grew up a stone’s throw from the airport and used to ride his bike over on Saturdays to wash the planes.

“I learned to fly after my senior year in high school and quickly pursued all of my certificates,” Vander Weide said. “I probably had my first ride as an eighth-grader. My first lessons came when I was a junior in high school.”

He took his lessons at the same airport he has been a part of for so many years. Although he does not have a formal college education, the classes and licensing he had to have to fly planes was intensive and expensive.

“There’s a lot of training and education to pursue all the different pilot certificates,” Vander Weide said. “So, in itself it has its homework and tests and tuition bills, which are large. You can pursue this outside of a collegiate institution.”

He first earned his private pilot’s license, then instrument following by commercial and airline transport — the highest level of aircraft pilot certification.

Vander Weide, who was a quick study, completed all of his certification in 18 months. His company AirFlair, which will be the fixed-base operator for the regional airport, has planes at the airport for flight instruction use as well as for rental and charter flying. —

The current airport will be vacated by the end of December, and all planes and equipment will be relocated to the new regional airport located at 3153 460th St. northeast of Maurice. The new facility has more space and room to grow and the job as airport manager will have some changes.

“It’s a great facility,” Vander Weide said. “There probably will be more airport planning going on there for the future. It will probably take up more of my time than it has been. The amount of traffic we see here will just be multiplied over there and by far and the No. 1 sector percentagewise will be business traffic.”

There have been some who have opposed and questioned the need for a new airport, but Vander Weide is convinced this is the right step at the right time.

“Sometimes ma and pa don’t see the business skies come and go and the transactions that are done like someone buying a vacant building because they fly in all the time,” Vander Weide said. “People don’t see that like I do, so I know it’s a very visionary and smart thing to proactively build the new airport.”

In Vander Weide’s time with the Sioux Center Municipal Airport another hanger has been built to accommodate growth and interest in air travel.

“We’ve seen this airport become really busy over time,” Vander Weide said. “We are really active for a community and a region of this size within Iowa. It’s unbelievable. That has certainly led to a strain on the facilities. The amount of traffic and services offered have been the main changes through the years. It’s just had a nice, steady growth over time.”

Vander Weide said in the overall business world, the change has been to gravitate toward air business travel and the value of air travel as a mode of transportation.

“One of the criteria for relocating a business, or expansion, high on a company’s checklist is the access by air,” he said. “A lot of the companies have gone to small and medium-sized jets, which we can really not accommodate here.”

At a Glance:

Name: Sioux Center Municipal Airport

Location: 3 miles north of Sioux Center

Activation date: August 1971

Acres: 160

Based aircraft: 14 — 9 single-engine airplanes; 5 multi-engine airplanes

Longest runway; 3,802 feet.

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