

Des Moines Register

DEVELOPMENT

Allegiant Air announces new opening date for its Des Moines base after pandemic delay

Kim Norvell Des Moines Register

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Allegiant Air plans to open its Des Moines base on July 1, delayed more than a year from its originally planned date due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Announcing the plan Tuesday, the low-cost carrier said it will invest \$50 million in the base, bringing two Airbus A320 aircraft to Des Moines International Airport and adding 66 employees, including pilots, flight attendants and fleet mechanics. Most of the jobs will pay at least twice the state's average wage of \$22.19 an hour, Allegiant said.

The base will allow more flexible flight times and bring future route opportunities, according to a news release from Allegiant. The company began service in Des Moines in 2003 and currently offers 10 non-stop routes from the airport to Orlando, St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Punta Gorda, Destin-Fort Walton Beach and Sarasota in Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; Phoenix-Mesa; Austin, Texas; Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

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"Establishing a base in Des Moines has been an important part of Allegiant's growth strategy," said Keith Hansen, Allegiant's vice president of government affairs.

Des Moines will be the 20th base of operations for Allegiant, which has its headquarters in Las Vegas.

The airline initially announced its plans in November 2019, with a goal of opening the base in May 2020. But the start of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 sent airline passenger numbers spiraling as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised against non-essential travel to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The International Air Transport Association says the industry is in "crisis," with \$118 billion in losses in 2020 and demand down 61% versus 2019.

In Des Moines, 1,295,685 passengers moved through the airport in 2020 — a drop of almost 56% from 2019, and the smallest traffic volume since 1984, according to the airport. But air travel is expected to rebound as more Americans get vaccinated.

"From new jobs to new destinations, we look forward to partnering with Allegiant as we welcome passengers back with affordable air service that connects them to the places and people they love," said Kevin Foley, Des Moines airport's executive director. "While it has been a difficult time for our industry, the Allegiant base announcement brings excitement and opportunity in the new year."

The pandemic also has delayed Allegiant's plans, announced in late 2019 and early 2020, to add routes from Des Moines to Chicago and Memphis, Tennessee, though it launched routes to Nashville and Austin.

The airport's spokesperson said it is unknown when or if the other routes will be added.

Allegiant is hiring for its new base. Positions are posted online at allegiantair.com/careers/home-page.

Des Moines Area Community College has chipped in \$600,000 to help train the company's new employees.

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