

Airport manager readies for retirement

[R nwestiowa.com/scnews/airport-manager-readies-for-retirement/article_bc638d42-3495-11ef-8305-e7b253159dc8.html](https://nwestiowa.com/scnews/airport-manager-readies-for-retirement/article_bc638d42-3495-11ef-8305-e7b253159dc8.html)

Eric Sandbulte esandbulte@nwestiowa.com

June 27, 2024

SIoux CENTER—After 44 years on the job, Randy Vander Weide is ready to retire from his lifelong career of airport management, having overseen the former Sioux Center Municipal Airport and the Sioux County Regional Airport.

“My tenure has allowed me to meet some incredible leaders and incredible Christian leaders. For that, I am so blessed,” Vander Weide said. “I just reflect whether it was through my business connections or the city of Sioux Center and its city councils and city managers and now over here with a different board, it’s all been great. Kudos to all those people on the way that made this a fantastic job and fun.”

June 30 will be the last day on the job for the 64-year-old rural Rock Valley resident. Andrew Schreier of Sioux Center, owner of AirFlair, will then begin as the new Sioux County Regional Airport manager.

As to why Vander Weide is retiring, he explained that the time was right.

“It’s important for me when I leave here to know that it’s in a good spot,” he said. “I’ve always said that when I leave a position, I don’t want anybody to notice I’m gone. I want it to run smoothly. With the board in place, the grants that are in place, the person who’s going to succeed me now in place, it’s all going well.”

For the moment, he doesn’t have any big plans for his retirement beyond spending more time with wife, Marcia, the rest of the family and potentially traveling.

“We’ll see what the Lord has in store,” he said.

Getting to become a pilot wasn’t something he dreamed about as a child, but he did like to go down to the former Sioux Center Municipal Airport at 3028 360th St. to look at the airplanes. The main thing that led him into aviation was simply proximity. Vander Weide grew up just east of the railroad tracks from that airport on 360th Street, also known as the Carmel blacktop.

“It was a quarter mile bike ride to the airport in the summer and after school, so I’d ride my bike there. The guy who was running the airport asked if I’d help wash planes for a little bit of cash. I was maybe a freshman in high school,” Vander Weide said. “And that’s it; I never left.”

By the time he was 17, he was taking flight lessons. As busy as his studies for that were, he stayed quite busy after he turned 19: he’d marry Marcia in 1979, start R&M Spray Service in 1980 with his good friend, Mark Sneller, and would assume the role of Sioux Center

Municipal Airport Manager as of April 1, 1980.

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 changed a lot in the aviation field, sweeping in host of new regulations that are still around, especially regarding background checks and monitoring watchlists. He was in a plane spraying an alfalfa field near Marcus that morning when a sheriff's deputy got him to stop a moment.

"I didn't know what he was talking about. He filled me in on the whole thing because I had left the house early and was in the plane the whole day. They said you're going to have to quit flying. I made the quick 10-11 minute flight back home and learned about the news then," he said.

Since his start, he's seen aviation continue to grow in Sioux County, grow enough that there was demand for a larger, regional airport, leading to the construction of the Sioux County Regional Airport. As a part of the team that led the airport project, he's seen the visionary work pay off.

"We opened in November 2018 and within four weeks, we were full. Seeing that was really cool and we've gone through additional expansions since then. We have a big one coming up this fall, which is probably going to be about a two-year project," he said. "We've got a number of businesses on the field, and every year, they expand."

A busy summer day at the Sioux Center airport would see as many as 40 planes take off. Vander Weide estimates that traffic at the new regional airport is about triple that, with about 120 takeoffs on a busy day.

"This airport serves the needs of instructing, agriculture, a lot of medevac, fixed-wing flights, corporate flights, a few personal flights," Vander Weide said. "I can just look back and see how this region has been helped by aviation. It has its fingerprints all over the economics of N'West Iowa."