OFFICIALS HOPE TO ATTRACT BUSINESS AVIATION TO OAKLAND COUNTY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

News / Business aviation

Officials are trying to bring more **business** to the county through the runways of **Oakland Country International Airport** in Waterford Township.

An estimated $300 million in business aircraft lined the runways as officials attempted to lure new clients to the state's second-busiest airport at an expo — believed be the first of its kind in the state — on Sept. 25.

Oakland County director of central services David VanderVeen said the event was an attempt "to put the buzz back in business aviation," which has weathered especially turbulent times of the recent economic recession.

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“We lost some traffic,” he said. “We want to put excitement back in the industry.”

Aviation is a $19 billion industry for the state and the self-sustaining airport, which does not offer commercial flights, has a $175 million economic impact on the county.

Business aviation is “fighting back vigorously,” according to Michigan Business Aviation Association chairman John Hatfield.

Many large companies continue to use commercial air travel, but many companies in Southeast Michigan could stand to benefit from private travel, Hatfield said.“People are hungry for this,” he said.

The event, held in conjunction with the non-profit organization, focused on the advancement of business aviation, featured 25 exhibitors and four workshops. Some 300 representatives from top aircraft manufacturers and other aviation-related companies were expected to fill the airport’s terminal for the event.

There, county officials reeled off the competitive advantages of using the airport, especially ease of travel.

Other benefits to flying out of the county airport include quick check-in, customs service for international flights, rare flight delays or cancellations and free parking, officials said. Also, flights leaving the airport have access to some 5,200 airports across the nation.

“We’re not saying we’re going to compete with the airlines, but here’s a benefit to private flying,” VanderVeen said. “Every airport has its niche.”

More than 150 corporations have some $200 million worth of aircraft based at the airport and nearly every Fortune 500 company passes through in the course of a given year, according to the airport’s we

The airport was the nation’s first registered airport in 1928. Today, it is open 24 hours per day, seven days per week and sees more than 500,000 passengers and pilots each year.

“This is an asset we try to sell to companies to relocate or expand to Oakland County,” director of economic development and community affairs Irene Spanos said. “Having a strong airport … helps them be more efficient in their operations.”

Flying privately costs as much or less than commercial travel and save time, she added.

“People think it’s only for the rich,” Spanos said. “It really isn’t.”

Spanos said the airport will see more use as the county expands its portfolio of foreign-based businesses.

“We are the gateway for global commerce, ” County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said.

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