

Big Picture  DuPage County Focus

Daily Herald

Thursday, January 20, 2005

DuPage Airport Set To Soar

By Harry Hitzeman
Daily Herald Staff Writer

DuPage Airport leaders hope to build upon last year's growth with a \$2.5 million Federal grant and two new hangars under construction.

Airport leaders reviewed year-end Federal Aviation Administration figures Monday and highlighted some of their plans for this year.

A host of taxiway improvements are planned, thanks in part to the federal grant secured with the help of DuPage County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom. The money also will be used for planning and rescue equipment.

"We were very fortunate to receive that money, and we'll put it to good use," said David Bird, airport executive director.

Throughout the year, officials at the West Chicago airport had compared its growth in flights and fuel sales to the sagging numbers of competitors like Palwaukee Municipal Airport in Wheeling and Aurora Municipal Airport.

For all of 2004, DuPage flights increased by 8.7 percent, while Palwaukee and Aurora were down 13.9 and 10.2 percent, respectively. DuPage had the largest percentage increase out of all airports in Illinois.

Airport Board Chairman Daniel Goodwin has long attributed the surge in business to quality service and increased marketing of the state's third busiest airport. The data just reinforced his argument.

"You can't attribute all our growth to the economy. There's something else going on," Goodwin said.

In the last decade, the types of flights at DuPage Airport have shifted from recreational and instructional planes to larger jets designed in part to relieve traffic from O'Hare International and Midway airports.

"We have cleaner approaches; we have wider runways; we have better facilities" said Mark Doles, airport director of operations planning.

The change has led to record fuel sales, which have helped the airport turn a profit.

The nearly 3.4 million gallons of jet fuel is a fourfold increase since 1992 and helped the airport turn a profit in 2004.

Officials hope that revenue, along with hangar leases, will eliminate the need to collect more than \$6 million in property taxes each year.