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BIG BUCKS FOR BIG BUCKS (AND BIRDS)

**FOR THREE MONTHS, HUNTERS FLOCK TO THE NEWLY RENOVATED
BROOKS COUNTY AIRPORT**

by Rick Davenport,
Texas Transportation Institute

When you pass through the rustic, old-fashioned entrance to the Brooks County Airport, you find yourself thinking out loud, "There sure isn't much to this place." → *continued on pg. 3*



Corporate employees and clients arrive at the Brooks County Airport and wait for their gear to be loaded up before being taken to a local ranch.



2009 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION SOON TO BEGIN.

The next session of the Texas Legislature will soon be underway. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) stands to receive a good deal of attention this time, particularly in light of the recent completion of a "Sunset review" of the agency. All state agencies undergo a Sunset review every 12 years and this year was our turn. The legislature will be looking at the review to determine what changes should occur for TxDOT.

No significant changes in aviation responsibilities or programs are anticipated. However, an initiative

lead by the Texas Airports Council appears to be gaining support.

The initiative is patterned after a successful effort by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPW) during the 73rd Legislature in 1993 to establish special accounts within the general revenue fund generated from certain sales, excise and use taxes to TPW.

Their idea is to redirect the revenue currently being collected on aviation-related sales and franchise taxes from the general fund into a TxDOT fund dedicated solely for the purpose of providing airport development grants for publicly owned airports in Texas. The money would be used to supplement the existing FAA and state grant programs for general aviation and air carrier airports throughout the state. The Texas Airports Council has made this effort a primary legislative issue for the upcoming session.

IS FEDERAL STIMULUS MONEY ON THE WAY?

We continue to hear talk of federal "stimulus money" to get the economy moving again. If that does occur, transportation stands to be a major recipient for funds to improve and maintain our nation's infrastructure.

Our highway and aviation improvement programs are falling further and further behind due to increases in construction costs as well as many other factors. Certainly, any new source of transportation funding would be welcomed.



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continued from pg. 1

Only a few hangars dot the 250-acre airport property, and most of them were probably not new 30 years ago. There are a couple of fuel trucks and a small headquarters building with unfinished cedar posts supporting the front porch. You can't help but wonder why there's an eight-foot-high metal-mesh fence that completely surrounds the facility. (More on that later.)

And then something strange happens. A jet appears on the horizon. "You know, that jet is about to land here in the middle of nowhere. Why in the world would...." Before long, it becomes crystal clear what a large corporate jet is doing in Falfurrias, Texas, population: 7,731.

Three Suburbans pull up to the taxiing jet. As a score of men emerge from the Gulfstream II, camouflage-dressed drivers get out of the SUVs, head to the plane's luggage compartment and start unloading duffel bags, backpacks and...gun cases. "Now I get it. This is, after all, South Texas deer and quail country, and all these men are here to hunt."

Turns out, hunting is the lifeblood of the Brooks County Airport. "November through January, we do 80 percent of our annual business," says Airport Manager Bond Cosby. "We stay busy during hunting season...and sure don't have much time for it ourselves." Brooks County is a haven for corporations that treat their clients and employees to the wildlife-rich region of South Texas. And thanks to a recently completed runway expansion project that lengthened the strip from 5,000 to 6,000 feet, larger jets are now able to fly in to the airport.

Inside the newly remodeled headquarters building—that has never had a "Welcome to Brooks County Airport" sign on it, but is being considered by officials—are large cork boards adorned with dozens of photographs. On closer inspection, the pictures are of people we all know that were taken at this secluded airport.

There are several photos of President George W. Bush, one as he's conducting a news conference with a throng of media and secret service folks milling about. His father, George Herbert Walker Bush, appears in many of them, along with former Secretary of State James Baker and former Senator Alan Simpson. And you recognize the golfers: Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, and Hale Irwin. Oh...and there are big- and small-screen celebrities like Sylvester Stallone and Tom Brokaw.

Although they all come here to hunt quail or a famous South Texas *Muy Grande*, there are not many deer photos. One, however, catches your eye. It's a big-horned buck on the tailgate of a pickup with its backside missing. "That deer got in the way of a landing jet," Cosby tells me. "The county didn't have the funds for a deer-proof fence, so our customers passed the hat among themselves." Ironical, I thought. Deer bring people to this airport, and they raised money to keep the deer out. "We all feel a bit safer now. Deer can sure mess up aircraft," Cosby told me.

Deer are a big boost to this region. "The estimated economic benefit of our airport is around \$1.5 million annually," Brooks County Judge Raul Ramirez says proudly. "And that's just what we know about it. We have lots of hunting camps that bring in their hunters by ground that we never see. But those hunters spend a lot of money here."

Ramirez credits the hard work and dedication of Cosby and Brooks County Commissioner Luis Arevalo, as well as the foresight of the Texas Department of Transportation for approving a nearly completed \$3.3 million airport improvement project. "The runway expansion means the airport can now accommodate larger class planes, especially in rough weather," Cosby says. "The extension, parallel taxiing and a lighting upgrade mean we are as safe as we can be. It's a big plus for our customers."

You can't help but notice the impressive, thick-horned, 10-point buck on a wall inside the office. Judging from the taxidermy work, it looks like an old mount. "Sixty years ago, my father shot that deer on the King Ranch with a friend who just happened to be the ranch manager," Cosby tells me. "Back then, hunting was just something to do. Now, it's more than just recreation. It's big business." ♦

A PROGRAM THAT WORKS

by Chris Sasser,
Texas Transportation Institute

When local RAMP Coordinator Tracy Cumby first stood at the end of the Abernathy Municipal Airport runway a few years ago, he couldn't be blamed if he scratched his head and chuckled a little after examining the myriad of problems the tiny airport faced.

The virtually dormant airport had recently been awakened by the buzz of area crop dusters, which were now using the air strip as a hub thanks to the area wide participation in a boll weevil eradication program. The city manager realized the dilapidated airport needed help, and quick.

Thankfully, providing expedient help is what the routine airport maintenance program (RAMP) is all about.

How it Began

Since 1996, RAMP has been assisting general aviation airports throughout Texas by providing matching grants for airport improvements. These improvement funds primarily apply to maintenance, but may also be used for construction as long as airside improvement requirements are met.

RAMP was originally conceived by then-new Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Aviation Division Director Dave Fulton, who presided over a similar program in Tennessee.

"When Dave came aboard, there was a tremendous emphasis placed on rebuilding the infrastructure of our airports," says Megan Caffall, TxDOT airport planner and former RAMP manager. "We created RAMP to give airport managers incentive to maintain these improvements over time."

What began as a \$10,000 per airport per fiscal year pilot grant program has grown to \$50,000 (airport/year) with just under 180 airports participating in 2007. And as of December 1, 2008, already nearly 120 airports have applied for the 2009 grants.

Kari Campbell, who took over as RAMP manager last summer, says that program growth and exposure are always a priority and wants to use a teamwork approach to achieve these goals.

"Right now our focus is on getting more involvement from our TxDOT districts to help us spread the word in their areas and regions as to what is available," says Campbell. "Our local districts can provide a lot of these services to the airports that are less costly but still maintain a high quality of work." →



As shown in the photo on the left, the Abernathy Municipal Airport runway was in poor condition with multiple pavement failures. The photo on the right shows the improved runway immediately after a slurry seal.

"We also want to focus more on projects. The primary concept of the program is to reduce long-term costs by encouraging preventive maintenance. To have the knowledge and resources of our district personnel available to our partners at the local government level will facilitate better long-range planning and encourage the implementation of maintenance projects. Funding projects that have been well-planned will prove to be the best use of local and state funds and the need for expending resources on emergency repairs should decrease over time," says Campbell.

Back to Abernathy

The Abernathy airport rehab project is a textbook example of the TxDOT district teamwork Campbell promotes.

"When I pulled into the Abernathy airport on the access road, my first impression was that the road was literally falling apart," says Cumby. "The edges were broken off the runway and the pavement was just shot with alligator cracking and failures. At one time someone had come in and done a chip seal so there was loose rock everywhere. There was rutting that was holding water on the end of the runway, so that was a dangerous situation. The vegetation was out of control. It was just a mixed bag of problems."

Realizing he had immediate problems that had to be fixed, Cumby used a combination of RAMP funds and good ol' fashioned West Texas "can do" attitude.

"I came up with the idea that the best thing for us to do is come in with a TxDOT crew to perform the prep work on the facility, such as sweeping, blade level-up and patching. This was cheaper than contracting the job out," says Cumby. "Then I contracted for someone to do the slurry seal and final striping. My whole idea was to get the job done because there was an immediate need."

The project was completed in under a week and now the city of Abernathy has a safe, functional air strip to service their clients.

"Tracy's work at the Abernathy airport represents what this program is all about," says Fulton. "It was a creative use of the available funds to help this small airport and their community." →

WHAT CAN RAMP DO FOR YOU?

- State funding is a \$50,000 match per airport for each fiscal year. The State fiscal year begins September 1. The local government match is 50 percent of actual costs plus any excess of \$100,000 total costs.
- The program includes "lower cost" airside and landside airport improvements. These items can be more than just maintenance and may be new or additional items of work. Examples are: construction of airport entrance roads; pavement of airport public parking lots; installation of security fencing; replacement of rotating beacon; etc. TxDOT will make the determination of the eligibility of specific items. Keep in mind that airside improvements are of first priority before requesting assistance with landside maintenance and improvements.
- Local governments are allowed to issue their own contracts for scope of services, or TxDOT local districts can perform services within their capabilities. TxDOT will not participate in contracts for any ineligible scope items or for costs that are unreasonable for the type of service. Local government force account work is NOT ELIGIBLE, but purchase of materials for construction with sponsor labor is eligible.
- A grant must be executed each state fiscal year, prior to work being performed, and before July 31 of the grant fiscal year. To initiate the grant, the city or county should contact the Aviation Division with a description of the project for which the grant is being requested and the estimated cost of the project, if available. The contact may be in the form of a written letter, electronic mail, facsimile, by telephone or personal contact with staff.
- Work as described on the scope of services of the grant shall be completed during the State fiscal year (September 1 – August 31).

Here to Help

Another bonus of RAMP is that the grant funds are easy to apply for and are available quickly.

"With the appropriate paperwork filled out, this grant can be awarded in a week's time," says Campbell. "I encourage anyone to contact us for more information and let us see how RAMP can help your airport."

For more information, call the Aviation Division at 1-800-687-4568 (68-PILOT) for more information or go to Aviation on the TxDOT Web site: <http://www.txdot.gov/services/aviation>. ♦

"Right now our focus is on getting more involvement from our TxDOT districts to help us spread the word in their areas and regions as to what is available," says Campbell. "Our local districts can provide a lot of these services to the airports that are less costly but still maintain a high quality of work."

WELCOME, KARI CAMPBELL

Kari Campbell joined TxDOT's Aviation Division last July after a career that included serving as the Moore County judge in Dumas for eight years. It was her experience in working with the local airport to secure maintenance funding that led her to move to Austin and become the RAMP manager.

"I feel like I have a lot to offer our sponsors because I've been on that side of the fence before," says Campbell. "Facing some of these issues can seem overwhelming."

For the last few months, most of her time has been spent out on the road visiting airports to see first-hand some of the problems they face. This personal approach is an aspect of the job Campbell enjoys.

"I absolutely love getting out and meeting people and building these relationships," says Campbell. "It helps them to put a face with the name and know that we are ready to work with them."



RAMP in action: A fog seal is applied to the runway at Wills Point Municipal airport.

2009



Texas Aviation Conference

*Sponsored by: The Texas Department of Transportation
Co-Sponsored by: Texas Airports Council and Texas Aviation Association*

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

May 11-13, 2009
Hilton Austin
500 East 4th Street, Austin, Texas 78701

Conference Registration

Pre-registration is recommended and will help us in planning and preparing a better conference. If you pre-register, your name tag and program packet will be ready when you arrive at the hotel. The fee is \$125 through April 10, 2009. **A \$50 late fee will be added to registrations received after April 10, 2009. A \$75 fee will be added for all on-site registrations.** You are encouraged to register online **OR** you may choose to return the enclosed registration form (one form per registrant) with payment to "TTI, Event Management and Planning" (EM&P) at the address listed on the form. Only cancellations received in writing by EM&P by 5:00 p.m. CST on April 10, 2009, will be refunded, less a \$50 handling fee. No refunds will be issued after this date. You may pay your registration fee by check, money order or credit card. **The registration fee covers conference handouts, break refreshments, Monday's get acquainted reception, Tuesday's luncheon, award's banquet and social.** Note: TxDOT employees are exempt from the registration fee but must register in advance.

Hotel Reservations

The Hilton Hotel is holding a block of rooms for our use at the nightly rate of \$199 for single or double occupancy. We encourage everyone needing a room to call immediately since we anticipate the rooms will be booked quickly. After April 10, 2009, rooms are subject to availability and may be at a higher rate. To receive this rate, please call the Hilton Hotel at 512/482-8000. Remember to mention the **Texas Aviation Conference** to receive the conference rate. The hotel has both self parking and valet parking for a fee. Please visit their Web site for additional information.

Special Activities

On Monday, April 15, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., our 12th Annual Golf Tournament is scheduled to be in Austin. There will be a fee. **All golfers must be registered to attend the conference.** Please contact Russell Deason with TxDOT Aviation for details.

Also on Monday, there is a 2nd Annual Bowling Tournament, *sponsored by Garver Engineers*, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. *Participants are not required to be registered for the conference.* Please contact Sandra Braden at 512/416-4544 with TxDOT Aviation for details.

A get acquainted reception, *sponsored by Associated General Contractors*, is planned for Monday evening from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The reception will be located in the Exhibit Area with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar.

On Tuesday, we will have our evening Awards Banquet located at the hotel. All participants are encouraged to attend. Guest tickets are also available for \$30. Tickets can be purchased online when you register for the conference. There will be a reception, *sponsored by Texas Airports Council*, prior to the banquet and a social, *sponsored by Rodriguez Engineering*, following the banquet.

Shuttle Service

If you need transportation from Austin Bergstrom International Airport, Super Shuttle is available. Upon arrival proceed to the lower level and collect your luggage, follow the signs to the Super Shuttle ticket counter located next to Baggage Carrousel 1. Tickets can be purchased one-way or round trip.

Special Needs

In compliance with ADA requirements, participants with special needs can be reasonably accommodated by contacting EM&P phone: 979/862-1219, toll free 888/550-5577 or fax 979/862-1225, at least five working days prior to the conference.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Aviation Division at 1-800/68-PILOT.

2009 Texas Aviation 2009 TENTATIVE CO

MONDAY, MAY 11, 2009

11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Golf Tournament
Bowling Tournament (*sponsored by Garver Engineers*)
Exhibitor Set-up
Registration/Check-in
Open
Get Acquainted Reception (*sponsored by Associated General Contractors*)

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2009

7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
8:30 a.m. – 8:50 a.m.

8:50 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
9:00 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

9:20 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.
10:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

10:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Registration Desk Open
Continental Breakfast (in Exhibit Hall)
Welcoming Address and Words from the Sponsors
Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division
Tim O'Krongley, Vice President of Texas Airports Council
Jay Carpenter, President of Texas Aviation Association
Introduction of Aviation Advisory Committee
State of the Aviation Division Address
Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division
The Future of 100LL and Alternative Aviation Fuels
Dr. Max Shauck, University of Houston
Coffee Break
Professionally Managed Share Ownership for General Aviation
Mike Brosler, CEO and President, PlaneSmart
Aviation/Airport Updates
Bill Gunn, TxDOT Aviation
New Trends in Aviation: BA609 Tiltrotor
Donald Barbour, Bell/Agusta Aerospace Company
Luncheon
Texas Airports Council Meeting

- Approval of minutes from previous meeting
- Election of 2009 Officers
- TAC Goals for 2009
- General Discussion

09



Conference

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Afternoon Breakout/Workshop Sessions

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

I: Airport Land Use Compatibility Issues

II: General Aviation Security Training for Small Airports

Waukesha County Technical College

III: Airport Markings, Paints and Regulations

Mark Cole, Eagle Enterprises

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

I: Airport Land Use Compatibility Issues

II: General Aviation Security Training for Large Airports

Waukesha County Technical College

III: Pavement Evaluation

Craig Phipps, KSA Engineers; Tim Martin, Fugro Consultants

4:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

I: Airport Marketing: A Manager's Perspective

II: Pavement Evaluation

Craig Phipps, KSA Engineers; Tim Martin, Fugro Consultants

III: RAMP Coordinator's Session

Kari Campbell, TxDOT RAMP Coordinator

5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Reception (Sponsored by the Texas Airports Council)

6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Awards Banquet

General Aviation Airport Manager of the Year, Most Improved Airport, Airport of the Year, Reliever Airport of the Year, Aviation Art Contest Winners

8:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Evening Social (Sponsored By Rodriguez Engineering)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009

8:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Exhibits and Registration Desk Open

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Breakfast Buffet

8:30 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Washington/Reauthorization Update

Henry Ogradzinski, President, NASAO

9:15 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Airport Cooperative Research Program

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

The Future of Small Community Air Service in Texas

10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

SEADOG Presentation/Panel

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

TxDOT/DOT-FAA AIP PROGRAM & LISTENING SESSION

Dave Fulton, TxDOT; Mike Nicely, FAA Airports Development Office, SW Region

11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Prize Drawing: Grand Prize, 1st Place, 2nd Place

2009



Texas Aviation Conference

REGISTRATION FORM

Register on-line at <http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tac08/>

To register for this conference, complete the form below and return with \$125 check made payable to: TTI-Avtn09, and send to Event Management and Planning, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University System, 3135 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-3135. Phone: 979/862-1219 and Fax 979/862-1225. NO PURCHASE ORDERS ACCEPTED. ONLY VISA, MASTER CARD AND DISCOVER CREDIT CARDS WILL BE ACCEPTED. ONLY CHECKS FROM U.S. BANKS ARE ACCEPTED. **TxDOT employees are exempt from the registration fee, but must register on-line.** If paying by check or money order, you may register on-line and then mail your payment. Only cancellations received in writing to EM&P by 5:00 p.m. on April 10, 2009, will be refunded, less a \$50 handling fee.

Name _____
Title _____ Company/Organization _____
Address, City, State, Zip Code _____
Day Phone Number _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____

I will be attending the following functions during the conference:

Note: The golf and bowling tournaments run concurrently.

Monday	Golf Tournament	Yes	No
Monday	Bowling Tournament	Yes	No
Monday	Get-Acquainted	Yes	No
Tuesday	Awards Banquet	Yes	No
Tuesday	Evening Social	Yes	No

___ I have enclosed my check or money order **OR**

___ I would prefer to pay with credit card (circle one) Visa M/C Discover

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____ Amount _____

For TTI Use Only:

Check Number _____

Check Amount _____

Receipt Number _____

NOTE: If you are taking a guest to the awards banquet who is not registered, please include an additional \$30. Please include their names below:

CUMBY WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

Tracy Cumby, Lubbock District maintenance administrator and RAMP coordinator, was one of the recipients of the "Extra Mile" award presented at Short Course in College Station on October 14, 2008.

Last February, Cumby was traveling the San Gabriel River bridge on U.S. 183 outside of Austin. He noticed traffic slowing and a line of cars stopped along the roadway. As he got closer to the bridge, he could see several people had gotten out of their cars and were lining the bridge looking down toward the river.

An SUV had run off the road and had come to rest just inches from the river's edge, and it was sitting precariously on the steep embankment in danger of rolling over into the rushing waters of the San Gabriel. There was one other person, who Cumby discovered later to be an off-duty police officer, working feverishly from the passenger side of the vehicle trying to administer aid to the driver who was unconscious and not breathing.

Cumby assisted in the rescue by clearing an airway for the victim, then administered oxygen and helped move the victim up the embankment to the ambulance.

"It was one of those situations where I really didn't have time to think and just rushed down to help however I could," said Cumby. "I'm just happy that I was able to help save a life that day."

Congratulations, Tracy, on a well-earned award. ♦

GRANTS RECEIVED

Lamesa Municipal Airport	\$1,720,000	The aviation work consists of: rehabilitate RW 7-25, rehabilitate hangar access TW, reconstruct & mark TW "E," mark RW 16-34, replace MIRLs RW 16-34, rehabilitate & mark TW "B," reconstruct & mark TW "F," mark RW 7-25, rehab & mark TW "C," reconstruct & mark TW "A" rehab & mark TW "D," rehabilitate RW 16-34, and rehab apron and TWY J.
Cleburne Municipal Airport	\$500,200	The aviation work consists of: new vault, signs and regulator, replace rotating beacon & tower, and install MITLs TW A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, & I.
Aransas County Airport	\$3,841,030	The aviation construction work consists of: demo existing taxiway D, overlay TW "A" from apron to RW 14 end, construct new taxiway D and taxiway E, rehab TW "F & G," improve drainage pipe under apron, install/replace signage and add solar TW Edge lights, TW C, install erosion/sedimentation controls, rehabilitate apron, reconstruct TW "C," reconstruct TW "A" from TW "B" to RW 18 end, construct partial parallel TW C to RW 32 & RW 36, reconstruct TW "B."
Fort Stockton-Pecos County Airport	\$606,777	The aviation construction work consists of: replace MIRLs RW 12-30, replace Sign Panels, replace/install PAPI-4 RW 12-30, install vault and relocate vault equipment.
McMahon-Wrinkle Airport (Big Spring)	\$6,910,659	The aviation construction work consists of: reconstruct concrete RW 17-35, mark RW 17-35.
Liberty Municipal Airport	\$777,944	The aviation construction work consists of: replace rotating beacon, replace MIRLs RW 16-34, and drainage improvements.
Coleman Municipal Airport	\$681,600	The aviation construction work consists of: rehabilitate RW 15-33, install game fencing & 4 gates, rehabilitate & mark TW to RW 33 end, rehabilitate hangar access TW rehabilitate & mark stub TW, rehabilitate & mark TW to RW 15 end, rehabilitate & mark apron, and stripe & mark RW 15-33.

WINGTIPS PROFILES

AVIATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER GREG JONES

Over the next several issues, *Wingtips* will profile the members of the Texas Aviation Advisory Committee. The six members are appointed by the Texas Transportation Commission for six-year terms and assist the Texas Department of Transportation with its aviation development programs. Committee members also work with members of the legislature on various aviation issues. Members must have at least five years of experience in the field of aviation and a strong interest in supporting Texas' general aviation program.

In this issue, we profile Committee Member Greg Jones.

When Greg Jones became a board member of the Texas Transportation Advisory Committee five years ago, he was 35 and the youngest member ever. Today, at age 40, he still is. Jones has always been a bit unconventional.

Jones became a first-generation licensed pilot while attending the University of New Mexico, where he was planning a career in Waste Management. His new hobby got him a part-time job in-between classes and on weekends for a regional freight delivery company. After graduation and on a whim, he placed an ad in an aviation publication seeking a piloting job.

"The phone rang, and on the other end was a man named Rick Perry who said he was the Texas Agriculture Commissioner, and he was looking for a pilot," Jones recalls. "That one phone call changed my entire career." After working for Perry for six years, Jones took a job with Southwest Airlines, working his way up to captain, flying Boeing 737s.

"It's a lot different than flying single and twin-engine Cessnas on regional flights," Jones says. "Today, we fly all over the country and I'm away from home for 60 hours. The good part is I'm home for four days straight." Jones says the time at home allows him to do things most spouses and parents with traditional jobs can't do. He has a wife and two children at home in The Woodlands, ages three and six.

In 2004, Jones got another phone call, asking him to serve on the Aviation Advisory Committee. "It's not only an honor serving on the committee; it's been a big learning experience highlighting the vital role regional aviation plays in the economy of Texas communities." →



Greg Jones in his office, the cockpit of a Southwest Airlines 737.

It was just a hobby 20 years ago, but it blossomed into a full-blown career. "I can't imagine doing anything else," Jones says. "Had I known then what I know now, I would have taken this flying thing a lot more seriously."

Wingtips: How important is aviation to you?

Jones: Initially flying was just a weekend habit. Now, it's how I make a living. I am lucky enough to work for an incredible company, Southwest Airlines. They treat me very well, and they are fun to work for. So, over the last 15 years, aviation has become increasingly more important to me.

Wingtips: What was your motivation in accepting the appointment on the Texas Aviation Advisory Commission?

Jones: Flying as a corporate pilot for six years, almost exclusively in Texas, taught me not only how nice most Texas airports are, but how important aviation is for this state on many levels. Now, flying all over the country, I have learned Texas has the best airport system in the country. However, there is always room for improvement. From a recreational level to a Fortune 500 company level. Whether you are flying the Cessna for that \$100 hamburger or the Gulfstream for a high power business meeting, I want to help with further improvements, expansions and even building new airports to continue and enhance aviation and our economy.

Wingtips: Was there a memorable experience that you can share that has occurred during your term?

Jones: We had a meeting in Sugar Land and TxDOT honored one of the greatest advisory members Texas has ever had, Bill Knowles. Afterwards we all had lunch together and I sat next to Bill. We talked about his family, his love for aviation and about a new airplane he ordered. It was the last time I saw him. Unfortunately for all of us, he died a few months later.

"The advisory committee will continue to better general aviation. There are airport improvement projects that not only focus on safety but also focus on attracting more business."

Wingtips: What are the biggest challenges you see for general aviation going forward?

Jones: With the economy in a recession, aviation as a whole is suffering. So, there are many challenges. The advisory committee will continue to better general aviation. There are airport improvement projects that not only focus on safety but also focus on attracting more business. Right now, that's a tall order—but if we continue to make general aviation in TX attractive and affordable—everyone will benefit, not only now but when our economy turns around. I'm assuming that Texas general aviation will have to do more with less because of government cutbacks. But, I feel confident we can do it.

Wingtips: What would you like the public to know about general aviation in Texas and why non-pilots should care about it?

Jones: General aviation is very diverse and every aspect of it is important. Some folks use general aviation for vacations, day trips and even lunch. Some use general aviation for business because of its convenience. Either way, general aviation has been, and will continue to be, vital to the Texas economy—both directly and indirectly. ♦

For more information on the TxDOT Aviation Advisory Committee, visit: http://www.txdot.gov/services/aviation/advisory_committee/default.htm.

TXAA HOSTS 2008 TEXAS GENERAL AVIATION SUMMIT

by Jay Carpenter

On Friday, October 31, 2008, the Texas Aviation Association (TXAA) hosted an event at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Austin, Texas. Entitled the 2008 Texas General Aviation Summit, invitees included general aviation associations, general aviation (GA) related businesses, universities and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Co-sponsors included the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), the Governor's Aviation and Space Foundation of Texas, the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) and the Aviation Division of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).

The summit began with moderator Dan Sullivan, CEO of Image Trends, Inc., introducing each of the invitees to the rest of the audience. Sullivan then introduced David Fulton, director of TxDOT's Aviation Division, who gave a brief history of the development of the division and the positive progress that airports throughout Texas have received. Fifteen years ago, most rural airports in Texas were in bad shape. Through the distribution of federal funds, TxDOT is able to build new runways, terminal buildings and weather reporting stations throughout the state. This development has resulted in a large boost in the economic development of local communities. Using data from Wilbur Smith Associates, Fulton said that over six billion dollars of total economic impact was delivered by airports to the state of Texas.

Former Texas State Senator Ken Armbrister delivered the keynote address. Armbrister informed the audience of the importance of communication with elected representatives both in the House and the Senate. "Although you initially might be dealing with staff, all reports and communications are delivered to the representative and given full consideration."

During lunch, the audience was entertained by Jim Schwertner, chairman of the Texas Aviation Advisory Committee. Schwertner introduced his special guest, Mrs. Emma Browning, who gave an eloquent speech about airport development, the role of FBOs and what should be expected for GA in the future.

The afternoon began with a special panel session moderated by Dan Sullivan. The panel consisted of Larry Silvey, representing the Governor's Office of Aerospace and Aviation, Shelly deZevallos of AOPA, Steve Hadley of NBAA, Mike Nicely of the FAA and David Fulton from TxDOT aviation. Each panelist gave an overview of the present situation and environment of GA in Texas, followed by a Q&A from the audience.

Following the panel discussion was a breakout session led by TXAA board member Gene Robinson. Each table was given booklets containing hot issues facing GA in Texas submitted weeks ago by the invitees. Each group addressed and finalized the top four issues of the long lists. A representative from each table gave a summary of their priority issues. The results of this poll and evaluation forms are being compiled by TXAA staff and will be published soon. ♦



Mrs. Emma Browning is awarded a bouquet of roses from TXAA. Jim Schwertner introduced Mrs. Browning to the summit.

HONDO'S HOPES SOAR AS TERMINAL OPENS

The Hondo Municipal Airport's rebound from dormancy accelerated on October 24 as a new terminal opened at the airstrip whose construction in 1942 temporarily transformed a small farming community into a bustling aviation hub.

"It looks like a real airport now," David Fulton, director of the Texas Department of Transportation's Aviation Division, told the crowd of about 100 at a ribbon-cutting for the building that resembles a country house.

The agency funded half of the \$640,000 terminal, which is one of several upgrades of late at the airstrip that local leaders call key to future growth in the Medina County city of about 9,000.

A new rail spur was recently built to connect the airport site to Union Pacific tracks, a new city hangar was constructed and airplanes now fill up at a \$220,000 fuel station that opened last year.

Also, last month, Air Evac Lifeteam of Missouri set up a helicopter ambulance base here, a venture that could add \$1.3 million to the tax base and 13 jobs to the workforce.

Keith Lutz of the Hondo Economic Development Corp. said the upgrades transformed a spacious but barren airstrip into a full-service destination with untold potential.

"Now we have the top two things that a private pilot needs upon arrival: a nice terminal building and fuel," he said.

The 4,000-square-foot terminal, which replaces a modular building, includes restrooms, computerized weather data and enough offices to rent two.

"We finally got it done," said Hondo Airport Board member Aniceto Colunga of the terminal that for decades was only the topic of idle chat. "It's going to again put Hondo on the map as far as aviation is concerned."

The city once enjoyed a prominent status in aviation circles, said Mayor Jim Danner, noting the town grew from 2,500 to 10,000 during World War II when the Hondo Army Air Field was home to the country's largest school for navigators.

Although the 3,600-acre airport hosted pilot training after the base closed in 1946, the city's population shrank and the site was underused for decades under city management.

But the ball was already rolling on revitalizing it, including plans for a 1,400-acre industrial park there, when Tim Fousse was hired two years ago to manage the airport.

But, as speaker after speaker made clear Friday, Fousse has played a critical role in advancing the multifaceted project.



The new terminal building at Hondo Municipal Airport.

Danner said the "theft" of Fousse from his former job leading Castroville's airport "made all the difference."

Beaming with pride, Fousse told the crowd that the way things are going, the building may have to be expanded soon.

Plans include resurfacing the main runway next year using a \$7 million grant.

City Manager Robert Herrera said the city also is negotiating with Wright Flyers Aviation about opening an international flight school at the airstrip.

The city is also discussing opening a museum to reflect the airport's rich history and help foster its future success.

"We're going to become a premier logistical park," Herrera said, calling the airport, "the port of entry to the future." ♦

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2009




TEXAS AVIATION
CONFERENCE

Mark your calendar and join us!

Make plans to attend the **27th Annual Texas Aviation Conference**. To be held on May 11, 12 and 13, 2009, at the Hilton Austin Hotel located in downtown Austin.

Be sure to check out our www.txdot.gov or TTI Web site <http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/find.htm> for up-to-date events.

Social activities will include our annual golf tournament, bowling tournament sponsored by Garver Engineers, get acquainted reception, another great evening reception sponsored by Rodriguez Engineering, awards banquet and lunch, all at an exciting new location in downtown Austin. We are working on making this conference better than ever.



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