

Chicago's DuPage Airport: A study in preparation and protection

by MEG GODLEWSKI
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You may have heard the saying, "Proper planning prevents poor performance."

They certainly have at DuPage Airport (DPA) in West Chicago. Careful planning has helped make the airport one of the key economic engines in the Chicago area.

It didn't happen overnight, notes Michael Masciola, director of business development and marketing for the DuPage Airport Authority. "It is the result of decades of careful planning," he said.

The airport sits on 2,800 acres in West Chicago, with about 1,200 taken up by the airfield. The airport authority operates DuPage Flight Center, an FBO at the field. Another 45 businesses, ranging from flight schools to pilot supplies stores, call the airport home.

"The airport has been the beneficiary of lots of investment over the last 20 years," Masciola said. "During the 1980s and the 1990s, the airport authority bought up the land around the airport, which gives us a tremendous buffer zone and space to grow. We have very little conflict or encroachment issues with the community because we are well buffered."

The airport itself has seen significant growth in the past three years, he added, as evidenced by 110,000 square feet of new corporate hangar space."

There are 480 aircraft based at DuPage, which Masciola notes is the most of any airport in the state of Illinois. Of those, 92 are turbine or jet aircraft.

The airport has four runways, ranging in length from 3,400 feet to 7,750 feet. About 58% of daily operations are general aviation traffic.

"We have a lot of corporate traffic, as well as the recreational pilots," said Masciola, "but we have seen an increase in corporate traffic over the last 10 years. It used to be that 30% of the fuel sales were Jet A. Now it is closer to 90%," he said, stressing that the non-corporate and hobbyist GA pilots still have a place at the airport.

"Because of our size we have been able to create some separation between the corporate and GA crowd," he explained. "The GA piston folks have their own runway, yet they get the experience of flying near the larger airplanes. They also have a pilot lounge and the corporate types have theirs as well. We also have plenty of tie-down space for GA pilots and we plan to soon redevelop some T-hangars that date back to World War II and are in need of being redone. In the future we plan to put out some requests for proposals for new condo hangars."

Another draw at DuPage Airport is the championship-style golf course.

"It is an 18-hole course designed by Robert Trent Jones," said Masciola. "It's on the south end of the airport. We also have an 800-acre business technology park. It's not necessarily aviation-related

businesses though. We received a \$34 million grant to put a state-of-the-art, highest-end fiber optics infrastructure into the park and that is attracting lots of businesses."

A recent study by the airport authority predicts that by 2011, 2,500 people will be employed in the technology park, he noted.

The study also calculates the total regional economic and fiscal impacts of business activities at the airport.

The 100-page report analyzed the airport's regional significance today and in 2011. It looked at economic and tax generation benefits of on- and off-property firms, visitors, infrastructure improvements and airport and technology park businesses.

According to the report, in 2006 the airport created \$373 million in local spending. In addition, it generated 2,490 jobs for area residents, with 1,430 of these employees working for the airport authority and its private sector businesses. The payroll related to these jobs totals \$106 million for area workers in metro Chicago.

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DPA BY THE NUMBERS

- Most based aircraft in the state (480);
- Most based jet and turboprop aircraft in the state (92);
- Most land available for corporate aviation development - currently 160-plus acres;
- Only GA airport in the state with four active runways and two ILS approaches;
- Only GA airport in the state with 24-hour FAA controlled tower;
- Only GA airport in the region with a 7,570 foot runway (longest runway outside of O'Hare);
- 108,000 square feet of new corporate hangar development has occurred in past few years;
- \$21 million in private investment over the past five years;
- \$32 million invested by the airport authority and other public sector sources in the past five years;
- \$8 million currently being invested in taxiway reconstruction and other infrastructure.