

# Flying into the future

DeKalb airport looks to business mindset to improve revenue, appeal

By **KELSEY RETTKE**  
krettke@shawmedia.com

DeKALB – Jack Penning wants people to know that DeKalb Taylor Municipal Airport isn't only a haven for rich people to park their planes. It's an economic driver in the region, and the airport's new strategic plan has the numbers to prove it.

The airport's future was the topic of Wednesday's DeKalb County Economic Development Corp.'s 2019 Business Roundtable with Penning, the keynote speaker, airport consultant and founder and owner of Fishers, Indiana-based Volaire Aviation. Since 2013, Penning has consulted for the airport and worked with Tom Cleveland, who's been the municipal airport manager for 17 years, to reconfigure the Airport Advisory Board to focus on building the local economy.

Cleveland and Penning both said the airport provides a vital service for big local employers, including 3M, Target, Johnson Controls, Bayer, Hy-Vee, Lowe's Home Improvement, DuPont, Menards, Walmart, Harvestore and Upstaging Inc.

"Corporate users get their staff to and from their facilities in our region," Penning said. "The airport is critical to the growth of operations [like those]."

"[The airport is] an economic engine for the area," Cleveland said in an interview at the airport, 3232 Pleasant St., DeKalb. "None of the big businesses in DeKalb County drive in, they fly in, and we are the first impression of the county. So if we're running a good, safe airport, and an airport that they can operate their corporate aircraft in and out of, they're happy when they leave here."



Jack Penning

According to an economic impact study by the Illinois Department of Transportation, the airport has an annual impact of \$10.7 million. The airport employs 17 people and supports 81 total jobs in the community.

During Penning's presentation to the DCEDC at Faranda's, 302 Grove St., DeKalb, he emphasized that with the new board structure, the airport will operate like a business.

"This was a massive change ver-



Mark Busch – mbusch@shawmedia.com

DeKalb Taylor Municipal Airport manager Tom Cleveland speaks Wednesday in a hangar at the airport.

sus how it was done before," Penning said in regard to making the advisory board more inclusive to countywide voices instead of only pilots.

The Airport Advisory Board is composed of seven people, including three DeKalb residents and four people representing various entities in the county.

Penning said the airport's strength is more than providing a space for wealthier individuals to store their planes. Cleveland said the airport has condo hangars that can be privately rented or owned, but it also has a community hangar and another hangar to store planes for the Fly America flight school.

"We'd love to expand [the school], but we're kind of stuck in this hangar," Cleveland said. "[The flight school] is the highest user of 100-octane fuel per month."

The school also provides corporate contracts and maintenance to pilots who come through the airport.

The board also adjusted its mission

statement to focus more on economic development and engaging the whole region to effect revenue streams, such as lowering the cost for fuel to encourage planes to stop in DeKalb instead of other regional airports such as Rockford, Rochelle or Aurora.

Penning said Cleveland's idea to discount the cost of fuel has raised revenue for the site.

From January 2016 to December 2017, the airport supplied 60,000 more gallons of fuel because of the cost reduction, which brought an additional \$137,000 in sales, an 80 percent increase, Penning said.

"We're getting all this money improving a city asset," Cleveland said. "That's very exciting to see where it was when I started and where we've gotten to today."

The city of DeKalb operates the airport through an airport fund, which it also uses to pay bond service, according to the adopted fiscal 2019 budget. In 2018, expenses for the airport totaled \$1.1 million, with total revenues com-

ing in at \$1.2 million. The city has budgeted expenses to be a little more than \$1.2 million for 2019, and revenues to come in at an estimated \$1.2 million, according to the budget. In 2018, revenue from the airport actually surpassed spending by about \$70,000.

The airport also collects funding from state and federal grants. Between 2000 and 2014, the airport received \$35 million in grant money, which went toward runway and taxiway extensions, new jet parking, runway lighting and a runway rebuild.

Future goals as part of the airport's strategic plan include developing greenhouse farming, installing an array of solar panels to the facilities to improve energy efficiency and an overhaul of its marketing and outreach strategies to better sell the airport to potential users and the region at large.

Cleveland and Penning encouraged residents to take a survey to provide feedback on the airport's strategic plan.

# DAILY CHRONICLE

SERVING DeKALB COUNTY SINCE 1879

Daily-Chronicle.com

## SPORTS



### Signing day

Local high school athletes commit to colleges across the country / 13

## LOCAL NEWS

### Raising concerns

DeKalb residents share thoughts on proposed boutique hotel / 4

## LOCAL NEWS



### Nearing the cap

County landfill narrowly avoids reaching 500,000 tons of waste in 2018 / 5

**SHAW MEDIA**  
est. 1851



# ALL SYSTEMS GO

DeKalb airport unveils strategic plan, reconfigured board, new mission / 3

**Tails Humane Society**

ADOPTION | SPAY/NEUTER | DOG TRAINING

www.tailshumanesociety.org • 815.758.2457 • info@tailshumanesociety.org

## TODAY'S WEATHER



**HIGH**  
**39**

**LOW**  
**0**

Periods of rain in the morning may freeze on surfaces and result in icy spots. Breezy in the afternoon, with rain tapering off.

Complete forecast on page 7