

Voyager Jet set to take next step, prepares for second expansion

BY JENNIFER CURRY

Having completed the first phase of its \$15 million expansion, Voyager Jet Center is ready to take its next step.

The West Mifflin-based private jet firm, located at Allegheny County Airport, last month opened 3.5 acres of ramp space that will allow it to park additional aircraft. In the past, the company could fit a couple of airplanes on its ramp. Now, it will be able to fit between 20 and 30.

"Having a big ramp is always advantageous," said Daniel Stainer, director of marketing for Voyager Jet.

"Prior to the ramp, there really wasn't that much space at all. You have a lot more flexibility logistically to do what you need to do."

It will also enable them to accommodate an expected surge of air traffic when the U.S. Open comes to the Oakmont Country Club in June.

Voyager has already begun preparations, with plans to include a tent, buffet lunch, listings of restaurant recommendations and pilot accommodations. The company plans to market the airport as a location that's quicker to go in and out of than Pittsburgh International Airport.

WE'RE NO. 1

"At Greater Pitt, you are seldom No. 1," said Richard Ryan, president of Voyager Jet. "Here, you are almost always No. 1 for takeoff and No. 1 for landing. This means less fuel, less maintenance."

In addition, travelers can now get to the company's hangar without passing through security, giving them direct access from Route 885, which leads from Downtown Pittsburgh, to the parking lot. This means that they can park their cars outside the secure area but would still have to go through the secure gates or the hangar before boarding an airplane.

Voyager, which last year announced that it would become a fixed-base operator, supplying fueling and ground support services for airplanes coming in and out of the Allegheny County Airport, is beginning the second phase of its expansion plan —

adding 1.5 acres of new ramp space and building a second hangar and office complex.

The second hangar will be similar to a mini-terminal and may include amenities such as an exercise room for pilots, large screen TVs and a rental car center.

"We are beginning to attract more airplanes to our facility and the airport," Ryan said. "It will enable us to grow. Right now, we are pretty full on the airplane side."

The company, which operates seven charter airplanes, has orders for two more and hopes to have 10 by year-end.

In addition, the company expects to sell twice as much fuel in 2007 as in 2006, Ryan said.

Ryan hopes to have the new ramp extension open in a year and the hangar within 18 months.

EXPANSION PLAN

The \$15 million expansion, which will be funded by Voyager and its private investors, is part of a broader plan by the Allegheny County Airport Authority to improve and update the county airport.

The first phase calls for building a series of t-hangars, which are designed to fit aircraft with wingspans up to 40 feet.

Later phases include an aircraft de-icing apron, a consolidated airfield equipment storage facility, a maintenance facility and additional hangars, according to the airport authority.

"Voyager Jet's development is important because it demonstrates a significant investment of private funds into the revitalization of Allegheny County Airport," said airport authority COO Brad Penrod.

"It provides the airport community and the West Mifflin region with important resources and economic growth."

Voyager's new center will also help to attract additional traffic to the airport, according to Stainer.

"The Airport Authority is very excited that we are expanding," he said. "Having a state of the art facility like this attracts pilots from all over the country."