

Red Deer Airport Central to Economic Growth

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It may surprise readers to learn that Red Deer Airport was the busiest airport of its size in Canada last month. For CEO RJ Steenstra, however, the numbers are indicative of the airport's economic force in the area.

"We know that strong, reliable air transportation is fundamentally important to the economic success of Central Alberta," Steenstra said. "Last year, we were the third busiest airport of our size overall, and our numbers have climbed 35% since that time. If we continue this trajectory, we'll rank number one in Canada for 2012 for airports of our size."

With a steady charter business serving the oil and gas industry and numerous large companies such as Servus Credit Union and Costco using the airport to conduct their business, the airport was well positioned for Northwestern Air to come in last year offering regular scheduled flights to Edmonton, Kelowna and Dawson Creek. These additions serve private citizens making connector flights, as well as the corporate clients who have used the airport for years.

Steenstra points to the airport's new partnership with Avis Car Rentals as another exciting opportunity. While the airport does a thriving business connecting national and multinational corporations with their Red Deer offices, his aim is to attract more local travelers with perks such as easy check-ins and free parking.

"The people who use Red Deer Airport understand the benefits as far as time, money and ease of travel," Steenstra said. "We serve a lot of busy people who don't want to spend time on the highway or money on parking." Not only do CEOs of multinational corporations use the airport, it also has bragging rights for flying world-famous entertainers such as Elton John and Jerry Seinfeld in to Red Deer.

"Red Deer Airport is responsible for bringing 40 million dollars into the community each year," Steenstra said. "Beyond the scheduled flights and charter flights, we provide hangars for many private planes in the

area. We also lease space to a number of businesses that are either aviation-related, such as Air Spray, Canada's oldest and most experienced heavy air tanker operator, or industrial enterprises that need production space and the convenience of shipping services immediately at hand.”

In all, the airport is home to 47 tenants, 15 of which provide commercial services and employment to the area. And the airport is poised for more growth. The City of Red Deer and Red Deer County are working on a Joint Area Structure Plan (ASP) that will be completed later this year. Once those parameters are in place, Steenstra and the RDRAA Board of Directors' will use the ASP to plan further development at the airport.

“The plan will provide focus as to which businesses we will pursue bringing to the region next,” Steenstra explained. “The airport consists of 900 acres and currently we only lease a small portion of that. There is great potential for bringing even more positive economic impact to the area than we already do.”

Red Deer Airport is involved in a number of economic partnerships that focus on bringing industry and people to the region, including Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP), Red Deer RED, and Central Alberta Access Prosperity and they take their community leadership role seriously. Steenstra believes that it's the responsibility of the community's large economic drivers to come to the table and work together for the prosperity of the region.

“With increased demand for air travel across the country, coupled with our ongoing operational achievements and commitment to customers, Red Deer Airport is poised to continue its journey to becoming a major transportation asset and economic generator for the area,” he said. “Our goal is for Red Deer Airport to be the aviation gateway to central Alberta.”

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