

# Red Deer Advocate

The sky's the limit for Air Canada at Red Deer Airport



Air Canada Express passengers disembark from a flight at the Red Deer Airport on Wednesday, during a celebration of the first anniversary of Air Canada scheduled passenger service at the airport.

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On Sept. 3, 2013, a large white tent provided shade from the hot sun as officials from three levels of government and representatives of the local business and aviation communities gathered at the Red Deer Airport to celebrate the launch of scheduled passenger service by Air Canada. Many of those people returned to the same tent on Wednesday — this time beneath cloudy skies — to mark the first anniversary of the national carrier's arrival.

During the intervening year, Air Canada carried more than 18,000 passengers to and from the Red Deer Airport, pointed out Eamonn Horan-Lunney, the airline's director of government affairs and community relations for Western Canada.

Many of those people were Central Albertans travelling elsewhere via connections in Calgary. But others were inbound passengers who helped to stimulate the regional economy, said Horan-Lunney.

“We’ve sold tickets from England, from Frankfurt, from all over the world for people to come here to Red Deer. We want to do more of that.”

He said later that Air Canada is focused on expanding its Red Deer service, which currently consists of three flights to and from Calgary every day.

“We’re always looking to grow. Usually the first growth is more frequency, so instead of three flights it might be four or five.”

Thereafter, he added, larger aircraft might be used. Expanding into a new market like Red Deer does present challenges, acknowledged Horan-Lunney. These include convincing prospective passengers to break from old habits.

“People are used to driving to one of the two cities an hour north or an hour south.”

Airport CEO RJ Steenstra said Air Canada is succeeding in changing those habits.

“After a year into this operation, I can tell you the market wants this service and they are using it, with thousands of passengers making Air Canada and Red Deer Airport part of their travel plans.”

Red Deer North MLA Mary Anne Jablonski praised Air Canada for showing confidence in the region. She and Red Deer County Mayor Jim Wood, Red Deer Mayor Tara Veer and Red Deer Chamber of Commerce past-president Gayle Langford all noted the importance of air passenger service to economic growth.

Steenstra added that Central Alberta has the ingredients necessary to ensure continued demand for seats on planes at the Red Deer Airport.

“We have a growing population, a high propensity to travel, a strong and diverse economy, a well-established business community, a strategic location, pride in our region and communities, and most importantly a travelling public that wants to see more.”

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