

# Airport to host pilot training

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MT. VERNON — The Mt. Vernon Outland Airport has been selected by AIRGO Incorporated, located in Centralia, to train Chinese students to fly commercial planes, according to Chris Collins, the airport director.

"I'm excited," Collins said. "It's an opportunity for the airport and it's a big economic opportunity for the region."

The airport will be a satellite operations base for AIRGO, which trains students from India and China for work in their respective countries' airlines.

"The owners of AIRGO would like to see 200 students per year in Southern Illinois," Collins stated. "Since this number is far too many for any one of our airports to handle on its own, the owners of AIRGO reached out to the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport to play a part in AIRGO's expansion plans."

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According to Collins, about 20 male Chinese students will train for 14 months in single engine planes and then will progress to twin engine planes which can range from two seat Cessna 152's to Beechcraft KingAir Turbos.

At the end of their training, and to graduate, the students must complete the curriculum with 20 hours of high altitude, twin turboprop training.

The students are expected to start on Monday, Aug. 1.

"When this opportunity materialized, we appointed a committee consisting of (Federal Aviation Administra-

tion) Designated Pilot Examiner Leland Widick, Certified Flight Instructor Steve Willis, Jefferson County Development Corporation Director Jon Hallburg, international businessman and pilot Larry Hicks and Chris Collins to study the pros and cons. After several meetings, it was the consensus of the committee that this is a fantastic opportunity for Mt. Vernon Outland Airport, the City of Mt. Vernon, Jefferson County and Southern Illinois," stated Airport Board Chairman Mike Ancona.

Information provided by Collins states the students are vetted by AIRGO, the U.S. State Department and the Transportation and Security Administration.

AIRGO's Mt. Vernon satellite will operate out of the Koziara Terminal in Suites 131 and Suite A off the lobby.

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