

Pilot Training Academy highlights airport board meeting

Other construction projects are also underway at airport

BY SHAWN SINGLETON
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — During its monthly meeting of Mt. Vernon Outland Airport Board of Commissioners, the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority announced the airport has been selected as a Satellite Operations Base for AIRGO Inc. located in Centralia. The company specializes in flight training of airline pilots with direct placement in Chinese Airlines.

"The owners of AIRGO would like to see 200 students per year in Southern Illinois," Mt. Vernon Airport Director Chris Collins said. "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 Mt. Vernon Outland Airport to play a part in AIRGO's expansion plans."

Chinese airspace is limited to the Chinese Military and the airlines. Flight training simply does not exist in China. Infrastructure is being developed rapidly - including aviation. Various sources estimate 1000-2000 professionally trained pilots will be needed for each of the next 20 years.

There are approximately 80 students at its Centralia location. Students are also trained in Perth, Australia; Toronto, Canada; Denton, Texas and Florida. AIRGO was the last international flight training entity to be approved as a Certified Flight Training Center by the China Aviation Commission (CAC).

Airport:

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All students are heavily vetted by AIRGO, the TSA and the U.S. State Department before being accepted for flight training here in the United States. The AIRGO program takes the student from zero time to Commercial Multi-Engine in 14 months. Graduates will complete the curriculum with 20 hours of high altitude, twin turboprop training at Mt. Vernon Airport.

"When this opportunity materialized, we appointed a committee consisting of FAA Designated Pilot Examiner Leland Widick, Certified Flight Instructor Steve Willis, JCDC Director Jon Hallburg, international businessman/pilot Larry Hicks and Chris to study the pros and cons," MVAA Chairman Mike Ancona said. "After several meetings, it was the consensus of the committee that this is fantastic opportunity for Mt. Vernon Outland Airport, the city of Mt. Vernon, Jefferson County and Southern Illinois."

The board also agreed on a new prevailing wage rate for 2016-17.

"We always do this in July or August," Collins said. "We wanted to get this out of the way so we didn't forget something."

The board also approved and completed several projects

around the airport, beginning with the tops of several trees being removed from the approach to runway 1-5. The job was awarded to Undercut Tree Service in Fairfield in May.

"The project went very smoothly. I was happy with the work," Collins said. "The property owners were pleased as well."

"I can't say enough about the great relationship we have with the property owners around the airport."

In addition to the trees, new automatic doors were installed to the flight-line doors.

"Those doors should have been done five to 10 years ago," Collins said. "This was something that got kicked down the road."

"Finally, we decided this was something that had to be done."

Funds were also allocated for a new roof to be put on the picnic shelter which sits next to the lake at the airport. Construction was com-

pleted on Wednesday.

"If we had waited another season [to put on a new roof], we wouldn't have had a roof," Collins said. "It's another project we kicked down the road that had to be done now."

The board also agreed to greenlight a runway surfacing project on Tarmac B-2, and an access roadway surfacing project at the proposed Innovation Park location.

Collins said, "We're gonna have a shelter we can be proud of, a runway that pressed for long-term use and a road that's made for economic development."

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