

Airport makes economic impact

IDOT releases study on
the economic impact of
airports across the state

By **NICK MARIANO**

nick.mariano@register-news.com

MT. VERNON — There's more than planes and helicopters soaring around the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

Airport General Manager Chris Collins said the local economy is too, basing his conclusion on a recently released study by the Illinois Department of Transportation on the economic impact of airports across the state.

With 149 jobs and a payroll of \$4.9 million, the total economic impact or output as a result of businesses or organizations reliant on the Mt. Vernon airport is \$18.9 million, the study found.

"The numbers are a reflection of the

see **AIRPORT/Page 3A**

AIRPORT

continued from 1A

attributes of the airport, outstanding infrastructure mixed with experienced and diverse tenants," Collins said.

Collins maintained the economic output tally should have been about \$4 million higher but was not because two businesses located at the airport but not reliant on aviation were not counted by IDOT.

Still, it's a long way to have come for an airport that seven years ago was struggling with more than a half million dollar debt and unloading aircraft and other assets including some services in order to recover. Much of that debt was due to paying bills on a failed restaurant managed by the airport prior to Collins coming on board and a number of money losing air shows.

Today, the airport has 10 tenants, including a privately owned restaurant, a flight training center and an aircraft maintenance enterprise — one of only a handful in the region. It hosts a number of events each year that bring people to the city from across the globe, and dozens of area corporations use the airport on an ongoing basis.

Collins suggested taxpayers are now seeing a significant return on their investment given an annu-

al tax levy of about \$315,000 a year.

"That's a 2,800 percent return on investment," Collins said of the economic output. "That's pretty exciting to say."

The study was based on 2011 or 2010 data at all 116 airports in the state looking at businesses or organizations reliant on airports, for instance airlines, flight instructors, traffic control, rental car businesses, airport management and hangar rentals to name a few.

Researchers for the study looked at how many people those businesses employ and their payroll, how much is spent on airport related activities including capital improvement projects as well what is spent in the community either by those businesses, their employees or travelers flying into an airport, and gross sales.

To airport board Chairman Greg Martin, the news comes as no surprise, he said.

"We've always believed the airport was a strong economic engine for the area. The IDOT economic impact study validates this sentiment," Martin said.

For comparison, employment at the

Williamson County Regional Airport in Marion was 195 with a payroll of \$6.6 million and a total output of \$21.7 million. However, the Williamson County airport provides commercial flights.

Other general aviation airports such as Mt. Vernon include Effingham County Memorial with 43 jobs, \$1.2 million in payroll and \$3.6 million in economic output. Centralia Municipal has 40 jobs, \$1.1 million in payroll and \$3.46 million in output.

Statewide, airports generate \$40.9 billion in economic output, the study found, with 337,419 jobs and \$12.8 billion in payroll. The study also acknowledge other "qualitative" factors difficult to measure including medical transport, aerial surveying and youth outreach activities.

"This is great news not only for the airport but the city of Mt. Vernon," Collins said. "We're kind of a front door when developers come here, and we all work together in the interest of Jefferson County."

10-11-12