

MT. VERNON & REGION

Mt. Vernon Airport eyes Jabiru business

BY LEIGH ANN WILLIAMS

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — The president of an up-and-coming aircraft manufacturer will return to the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport in the spring and bring with him the potential for a dealership and service center to locate in the area.

Mt. Vernon Airport Authority Commissioner Mike Ancona said he recently returned from a trip to Florida, where he attended an Air Expo highlighting light sport aircraft.



Mike Ancona

Light sport aircraft are considered by many in the industry as the next generation of flight and provide a more affordable and accessible path to obtaining a pilot's license. A certified light sport pilot can earn a pilot's license in half the time of the traditional license and at nearly half the cost, according to information previously provided by Jabiru.

Ancona said he spoke with

Jabiru owner Pete Kortje and learned the company was considering expansion that would include a dealership and service center somewhere in the Midwest.

"Our excitement about this is that maybe we can lure those guys here," Ancona said.

Jabiru manufactures about one aircraft per week with plans to increase those numbers to 100 aircraft this year, Ancona said. The increase to 100 aircraft per year would represent 5 percent of the light sport market, he added.

The commissioner contacted an operational dealership in Glendale, Ariz., and received positive feedback, he said.

Ancona outlined the location of Mt. Vernon, the expertise in the service provided by fixed-base operator SRT Aviation and the facilities of the airport as primary draws for Jabiru locating in the King City.

"I was encouraged about it," Ancona said of his discussions with Kortje. "This is an aspect of aviation that's really growing."

Jabiru representatives previously visited Mt. Vernon in June as part of the company's Jabiru Sport Aircraft Tour and brought its J170-SP

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MT. VERNON AIRPORT AUTHORITY COMMISSIONER

and J250-SP planes.

According to its Web site, "Jabiru is Australian designed and manufactured using Fibre Reinforced Plastic [FRP] technologies. The Jabiru design incorporates many of the traditional FRP technologies and techniques developed in glider and homebuilt aircraft design

over the past 20 years. It is a system which offers light weight at the same time as high structural integrity, clean aerodynamic design and minimum maintenance."

Jabiru shipped its first kit to the United States in June 1995. The Federal Aviation Administration formally accepted the Jabiru SK as

"eligible for airworthiness certification" on Feb. 8, 1996, according to the company.

Since its inception, Jabiru holds the unique position of developing into both an aircraft and aircraft engine manufacturer.

Jabiru engines are now being used in more than 30 countries and in popular light aircraft and experimental types.

The company borrows its name from Australia's only natural stork. The Jabiru stork is noted for its ability to soar and glide and its prominence in flight.

Jabiru USA is based in Shelbyville, Tenn. lwilliams@morningsentinel.com