

# 2006 success prompts SRT to expand in 2007

By GREGORY R. NORFLEET

gregory.norfleet@register-news.com

MT. VERNON — When Air Evac Lifeteam decided it wanted to drop its airplane refueling business, three friends from the Metro East area saw an opportunity to go into business for themselves.

And as Shawn Sayle, Rich Carney and Tom Brand look back on their success after only seven months in business, they have plans to expand in 2007.

But running a Fixed Base Operation was not even part of the plan — they wanted to focus on maintenance and repairs. Taking in the FBO, though, ended up helping them draw new customers to their location at Mt. Vernon-Outland Airport.

SRT's business plan set targets for how much gas they should sell and how much revenue they needed from the shop. The company hit both targets.

"We sold more than 10,000 gallons of gas every month," Sayle said. "We exceeded our goals."

Maintenance was only "slightly higher," but it was higher. Enough that SRT now plans to do more business in 2007.

"We expect to exceed our goals across the board" this year, he said.

The company is building upon its success by expanding its services. It is right now shopping for an insurance carrier so that it may open a flight school, Sayle said.

The three partners credit



SRT Aviation's most active partners, Vice President and Director of Maintenance Shawn Sayle, left, and President Rich Carney, pose with an aircraft in for maintenance. SRT Aviation met its goals in 2006 and now plans to expand in 2007. GREGORY R. NORFLEET/REGISTER-NEWS

their success mostly to top-notch service, attention to details — like washing windshields — and word-of-mouth advertising by its clients.

"One guy said that it's been eight or nine years since anybody washed his windows," Carney said. "Something so small can mean so much to them."

The company has seen "a lot" of return traffic, even from pilots who "accidentally" landed here when they were searching for somewhere else.

"Once they get here," Carney said, "we're finding they're coming back as regular customers."

SRT has seen an increase in general aviation traffic, freight and cargo planes, military aircraft and charter planes, Sayle said.

"They're coming from all over the country to come here," he said.

The company even has a mascot — Meatball, a rat terrier — whom clients radio in and ask about even when they're just flying by.

Sayle said that the company recommends Silver Streak restaurant to pilots and passengers looking for a meal, and he estimates that 45 to 50 percent of visitors go into town to spend money here. Those visitors include officers from corporate headquarters, like Continental Tire North America, Walgreens, pharmaceutical companies and hospitals, he said.

Any many pilots have told SRT staff that they skipped St. Louis' Lambert International to avoid the air traffic, he said.