

Mt. Vernon Outland Airport flying high

BY DANIELLE TYLER

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — In the last two years, Mt. Vernon Outland Airport has taken giant steps in strengthening and reforming the community airport, and now it has been recognized for its achievements.

Mt. Vernon Outland Airport recently took top honors and was named by the Illinois Department of Transportation Division of Aeronautics as the 2007 Category A (runways 5,500 feet in length or longer) General Aviation Airport of the Year.

"This is a tremendous honor for our airport and our community," airport manager Chris Collins said. "This award speaks highly for the staff and large number of volunteers who work out here, many who go unseen, on-field tenants and our neighbors."

According to a letter from Dr. Susan R. Shea, director of the Divi-



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FLYING HIGH — Mt. Vernon Outland Airport was recently named the Airport of the Year by the Illinois Department of Transportation Division of Aeronautics, and these two men, airport board Chairman Mike Ancona and airport manager Chris Collins, are especially proud of the significant changes and improvements that have taken place at the airport in the last two years.

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sion of Aeronautics, the airport was selected due to recent improvements to airfield facilities, good maintenance of the facility, preservation and enhancement of airfield safety as well as good community relations.

"We've made a big turnaround in the last two years," Collins said. "We just completed the tree project, one of the largest in the state. When difficulties arise, we find a way to make it work. We try to find a way. We continue to be positive and involve the community as much as possible because we are the community's airport."

Collins cited SRT Aviation,

the company handling the airport's fixed-based operations, the newly opened Apple Dumplin' Grandma's Way restaurant, the first Outland Airport restaurant in three years, Air Evac base operations, the completed runway revitalization project and the newly acquired Air Rescue Fighting/Rapid Intervention Vehicle as reasons to celebrate the airport's success.

Commissioner Alan Hale, who served as chairman of the airport board of commissioners for the last two years, said he is especially pleased at the airport's ability to bounce back after a difficult period.

The airport increased revenue this year by 20 percent and has achieved "in the black status" for two consecutive years. In addition, 28 new jobs were created at the airport in

the last two years.

"These are jobs that just weren't here before," Hale said. "Everyone has done a tremendous job these last two years."

"This has been a two-year effort to get where we want to be," Chairman Mike Ancona said. "A lot of neat things are coming into place and we have been fortunate ... We're just really proud."

The award will be presented to the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport board of commissioners and Collins during the Division of Aeronautics Award Luncheon at the Illinois Aviation Conference on May 23 at the Westin Chicago North Shore Hotel in Wheeling.

The last time Mt. Vernon Outland Airport received this award, Collins said, was in 1994.

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