

Outland Airport among Airport of the Year winners

*The airport received the 2023
award for Large General
Aviation Airport of the Year*

BY JOSH JONES

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MOUNT VERNON — Mount Vernon Outland Airport is one of six airports to be named Airport of the Year by the Illinois Department of Transportation.

According to an IDOT news release, the awards reflect the importance and vitality of the state's aviation system. The awards were presented on Tuesday during the Illinois Public Airports Association Fall Conference in Galena.

Mount Vernon Outland Airport received the 2023 award for Large General Aviation Airport of the Year. Also in the local area, Salem-Leckrone Field received the 2023 Small General Aviation Airport of the Year award.

Mount Vernon Airport Director Chris Collins said that they're always honored to be selected when there is so much competition statewide.

"Our category has some really stiff competition so to be selected is really special," Collins said, later adding, "We are just honored to have been selected, because that category is very competitive and there are a lot of great airports in that category."

Collins said the awards have always addressed excellence in safety and maintenance issues and he be-

lieves that still holds true for this year. He said about two months ago IDOT representatives visited the airport and seemed to be impressed by the various community hub aspects of the facility.

"They were blown away by the restaurant (Bonnie Cafe), especially hearing 100,000 customers a year through the facility," Collins said.

"They were also really excited to see the soccer program, they drove in so that first impression of seeing all the soccer nets, they were asking about that. Sheila (Jolly-Scrivner,

airport administrative assistant) showed them some photos of what happens here on the weeknights and on the weekends with soccer. They thought that was really special."

Collins said that IDOT officials were also impressed by the amount of people who become pilots, and the airport's long-term support of the aviation industry. He said that Bureau Chief of Aviation Safety and Education

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Submitted Photo

AIRPORT OF THE YEAR — Mount Vernon Outland Airport is one of six airports to be named Airport of the Year by the Illinois Department of Transportation. Mount Vernon Outland Airport received the 2023 award for Large General Aviation Airport of the Year.

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Jeff Hurst also recognized Mount Vernon Outland Airport for hosting the nationally recognized Midwest LSA Expo for 15 years. Other highlights include the airport's \$40.2 million economic impact and how for every one dollar invested the airport returns \$122 to the local economy.

Collins recognized the Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners and Jolly-Scrivner for making the long trip to Galena to receive the award.

"They made a major commitment to get up there and accept the award and I was appreciative to see them there ... and so were the members of the Illinois Public Airport Association," Collins said.

The facilities were selected because of their accomplishments, including an outstanding partnership with IDOT and a strong commitment to customer safety and satisfaction.

Among the award considerations are cooperation and coordination with the state, safety record, maintenance of the facility, and promotion of aviation and educational events.

Mount Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners Chairman Mike Ancona said that this was the second time the airport has received this award.

"It is a privilege to be the recipient of it and it just represents the hard work into making something like this happen," Ancona said. "It is a well deserved honor, our airport is great and it is something we can really be proud of in our community."

The other 2023 recipients include: the Willard Airport in Champaign receiving the Primary Airport of the Year award, Lewis University Airport receiving the Romeoville Reliever Airport of the Year, Tri-County Airport in Yates City receiving the Private Airport of the Year award, and Vertipoint Chicago receiving the Heliport of the Year award.

Illinois is home to 100

public-use airports and heliports, with nearly 3,000 aircraft registered with the Federal Aviation Administration. The system of airports supports more than 492,000 jobs, with a combined payroll of \$21.9 billion and a total economic impact of \$95.4 billion. Across the state, there are over 700 aviation facilities, including heliports, balloon, glider and ultra-light landing facilities, and grass landing strips.

Through Gov. Pritzker's historic, bi-partisan Rebuild Illinois capital program, IDOT is investing a total of \$150 million in aviation. In 2021, the governor announced a \$94 million commitment to airports throughout the state, unlocking \$11.5 million in local contributions for a combined investment of \$105 million. The funding was the largest statewide capital investment for airports in state history, the release states.

To learn more about aviation in Illinois and the Illinois Aviation System Plan, visit www.ilaviation.com.

9-30-23

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