



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Georgetown County airports celebrate Aviation Week

GEORGETOWN COUNTY — Aviation has come a long way since the first airplane landed in Georgetown County, near Willowbank, in 1911.

These days, the county has two bustling airports and those facilities have a direct economic impact of more than \$1 million for the county. The indirect economic impact is more than \$900,000 and factoring in the “trickle down effect” increases the impact to up to \$3.5 million, according to retired Major Gen. Gerald Harmon, the county’s representative on the S.C. Aeronautics Commission.

Those numbers are among many reasons county officials and aeronautics enthusiasts gathered at the Georgetown Airport on Aug. 19 to celebrate S.C. Aviation Week. Harmon was the keynote speaker for the event.

“When you invest in aviation, there is a great return on that investment,” he told a crowd of a few dozen. “A lot of people may not realize that when you invest in infrastructure such as the airports in our state, 90 percent is paid by the federal government. Local and state government split the rest equally. But this doesn’t come on the backs of taxpayers.”

The money instead comes from aviation fees and other funds directly linked to aviation.

“Aviation is a self-sustaining industry,” Harmon said. “It’s an economic engine not only for our airport but our entire state.”

Statewide, the dollars linked to aviation are in the billions, he added.

Georgetown County’s two airports employ 47 people, house more than 40 aircraft and see well over 100 takeoffs and landings every day. The county’s airports are also active in the support of businesses as well as the growing tourist industry.

“Aviation is a vital component of Georgetown County’s economic development strategic plan and we are pleased to have an airport commission and County Council that support this important industry,” said Ray Funnye, director of the county’s public services department, which is in charge of the airports.

“This airport, with the support of the S.C. Aeronautics Commission and the FAA, continues to make substantial improvements to the airport infrastructure to ensure that the flying public has a safe and accommodating facility to use.”

The airport in Georgetown has undergone about \$11 million in improvements since 2007, including a \$2.5 million terminal construction and a 1,000-square-foot runway expansion. The runway is now 6,000 square feet, which allows the county to bring in larger aircraft.

Funnye also bragged on the work being done by the airport manager, Rick Westfall, and the fixed-base operator, Seven Rivers Aviation, as well as those who helped pave the way in years past.

While many people may think of their local airport as the equivalent of an aerial yacht club, operating for the benefit of a few private pilots, the numbers show the county's airports are much more than that.

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