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Strictly Speaking



The following is a reproduction of a column that was previously published in the Waterloo Chronicle.

Local Airport Takes Off!

Over the years our community has had a somewhat distant relationship with the airport. Many readers may remember when the airport was a field with a landing strip and a small hangar on Lexington Rd. in Waterloo. After moving to its present site in the village of Breslau, Woolwich Township, the airport was always a part of our community but remained distant. It was, and is, a great place to learn to fly, and for many years I remember a stunt pilot practicing his trade every Saturday. Occasionally as a youngster I would watch the planes take off and land but mostly my experience was limited to trying to ignore that stunt pilot whenever I was playing golf at Beaverdale or Brookfield.

The first time I used the local airport for a commercial flight was about 3 years ago with Trillium Air, (who are no longer in operation,) I arrived for an early morning flight to Ottawa and discovered that the flight was full with about approximately 18 passengers. Walking onto to the tarmac and climbing up the stairs to board the plane had a pioneering feel to it. The flight was a little noisy, but comfortable, and we departed and arrived on time. Based on this experience I concluded that driving my car to Breslau and hopping on a plane to Ottawa was much more relaxing than struggling with the traffic and tension of flying out of Pearson. Unfortunately Trillium Air was not able to make a go of it and the experiment with commercial flights ended.

The region realized that if we truly wanted commercial flights, and larger cargo capacity for industry, we were going to have to get serious about the airport. Plans were made to expand the runways and build a brand new multi-million dollar terminal. It was the quintessential, “build it and they will come” scenario, a true “field of dreams”. Making this size of an investment without a commitment from a commercial carrier was a risk. What would happen if after spending millions of dollars of taxpayer’s money the region was still unable to secure a commercial carrier?

My next visit to the airport was in the fall of 2003. In September I arrived to a brand new terminal building without a soul in it, no signage and an eerie feeling that I was the only person in the whole place. I eventually found someone on a desk tucked upstairs in a corner who confirmed that the flight I was looking for was on time. Needless to say, I was not impressed.

Airport off to a Flying Start

Regional officials could not have timed it any better. Prior to the official opening ceremonies of the Waterloo Regional International Airport the terminal was a hub of activity; several paying customers were lined up at the Northwest Airline check in counter, a private jet had just landed adjacent to the new main terminal and passengers from a turbo-prop were disembarking in plain view of everyone in attendance. In fact the President of QuikAir was unable to get a return flight on his own plane because it was full and he had to take a 7 hour train ride from Montreal. I must say the opening ceremonies were quite impressive and hopefully a true sign of things to come.

Local Passengers Needed

According to surveys, approximately 1.4 million people a year use air travel to get to and from Waterloo Region. To truly make the Airport a success and a valuable community asset we must use it, and to do it right we have to go after the local market first. I strongly encourage local residents to check out the airlines websites to see if it makes sense for your travel plans to fly out of Waterloo. Daily commercial flights to Ottawa and Montreal do not have as flexible a schedule for business travel as Air Canada but the trade-off is not having to drive to Pearson. Daily flights to Detroit link travelers up with one of the biggest terminals in the world which makes it easier to make connecting flights. To make the local airport a success we all need to use the available flights when we can. Check out these websites www.nwa.com and www.quikair.ca support your community, and fly local.