

New Mexico Airports

Economic drivers through history

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Throughout history, municipalities in New Mexico have had to develop creative methods for improving living standards for their residents. Harsh economic conditions have limited the ability of municipalities to spend money through traditional economic development. Just as unique and diverse as the culture is throughout New Mexico, so are some of the stories of municipalities which utilize airports and aviation in New Mexico in order to meet the purpose of true economic development.

Economic development creates jobs so that the residents will remain living, working, and spending money within the local community. This increases the municipality's tax base and encourages new business activity, making that municipality attractive to other potential businesses and residents. Airports have played a key role in New Mexico's economic development.

Niche Services Saved Roswell's Economy

Roswell International Air Center was created in response to the closure of Walker Air Force Base in the 1960s. Great minds in the city developed the air center as a method for averting the potential economic disaster from the Department of Defense pullout.

Mayor Gail Harris established a group known as the Roswell Industrial Development Corporation (not in existence today) to advance economic strategies, keeping Roswell from becoming a ghost town – not an uncommon fate for other municipalities with base closures. The commission's efforts transformed previous base property into the Roswell Industrial Air Center.

The unique developments at this airport occurred through the use of the airport as a one-stop shop for all of your aircraft needs. Through the years – and with prompting from the city for industrial development – airlines have found that Roswell is a prime location for aircraft storage because of the dry conditions that prevent corrosion. Aircraft is brought to Roswell to either be stored during economic downturns for airlines, be sold by airlines looking to upgrade either own fleets, or be scrapped for parts to



The Roswell Army Flying School was operated from 1941 - 1963. Airmen (above) prepare cameras for a Beechcraft AT-11 Mission. (Left) President Reagan and Apollo astronaut Harrison Schmitt visit Roswell International in 1982. (Right) Armstrong has assisted with ongoing improvements to pavements at the airport facility.

help airlines maintain their existing fleets.

This unusual niche continues to bring aviation maintenance businesses into the area, stimulating the economy by providing jobs to local residents and increasing the tax base for the City of Roswell. Business expansion in the area has led to a demand for commercial air service. Currently, Roswell International Air Center has regular scheduled flights to and from Dallas/Fort Worth and Phoenix.

Without the quick thinking of the residents in Roswell, the City may have become a ghost town. A cohesive approach prevented that fate, and now Roswell is a thriving industrial area.

How Lindbergh Changed Lordsburg

The City of Lordsburg also promoted economic development by capitalizing on the publicity of Charles Lindbergh's transcontinental "Spirit of St. Louis" air tour in 1927. Although the single event was a boost in revenue for the local businesses, it served to further enhance and promote aviation throughout the entire state.

Charles Lindbergh's trip put Lordsburg "on the map" in the aviation community and provided long-term benefits for the aviation industry in New Mexico.

Lindbergh's trip put Lordsburg "on the map" for being a part of the exciting and new aviation industry. What is now the Lordsburg Municipal Airport was established by the Army in 1914, according to Hidalgo County Service Records. After World War II, the airport became property of the City of Lordsburg. While airfield was owned by the Army, it was selected as one of the stopping points for Charles Lindbergh during his transcontinental tour. Some speculate that it was because there was no other place for Lindbergh to land that fit into his tour between Arizona and Texas – however, it is more likely that Lordsburg was selected because of its existing airmail service flights occurring at the airport during that time.

No matter the real reason for the stop, Lordsburg had an opportunity to promote to the furthest extent a once-in-a-lifetime event that people across the southwest could enjoy! Thousands of people were said to have been at the historic event to hear Lindbergh speak. An entire program was developed around the landing of Lindbergh, and kids crowded around just for the chance to look into the aircraft.

Publicity from the Lindbergh flight allowed Lordsburg to be selected as a control point for the National Air Races and a destination for famous aviator Amelia Earhart.

Can Your Airport be a Catalyst for Growth?

There are many typical ways that airport development can impact economic development within communities. Air travel is necessary in New Mexico because of the distances between municipalities. Economic growth happens not only from providing air service, but also through fuel sales, restaurants, and even construction projects. There are so many opportunities for municipalities that own airports in New Mexico ... the sky is the limit!



The City of Lordsburg hosted the Spirit of St. Louis air tour in 1927, when the airport was still owned by the Army. Charles Lindbergh's visit sparked increased interest and economic development around the aviation industry in New Mexico.

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Jacque Smith is a civil engineer with Armstrong Consultants, Inc. For more than eight years, Jacquie has assisted with engineering, planning, and project management services for more than 15 airports across New Mexico. Her areas of expertise include engineering designs, construction safety, Disadvantage Business Enterprise programs and goals, land acquisition, drainage, site development, and construction inspection and project management. Jacquie is currently involved in a variety of airport projects ranging from pavement maintenance to runway lighting. Her duties include engineering design, assisting with construction plans and specifications, assisting with scope of work, cost estimating, report writing, and assisting with grant applications and construction documentation. A native of New Mexico, Jacquie has an enthusiasm for the development and growth of the area.