

Mesa mayor hails plane facility

Expanded Gateway maintenance operation will service corporate aircraft

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Mesa Mayor Scott Smith stood in front of a new \$21 million corporate jet and told scores of aviation executives he was giddy.

Smith's joy was all business as he celebrated Hawker Beechcraft Corp.'s completion of expanded maintenance facilities that will serve high-dollar corporate aircraft in a market not abundant with big corporate headquarters.

The aircraft company's executives said during Thursday's grand opening that they hope to turn the new operations at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport into a destination for servicing Hawker Beechcraft's jet and turboprop business line of aircraft, including nearly 800 based in the Valley.

"I'd like to make it a true destination airport for people who want to work and play," Drew McEwen, general manager of the company's Gateway facilities, said after he welcomed nearly 200 Valley business and government leaders to the celebration.

Though Phoenix is not a big corporate market, the area is rich with tourism, an industry that also attracts the type of general aviation that will use the Hawker Beechcraft service operations, said business and airport executives.

Mesa's average of 325 days of sunshine a year and its proximity to golf courses and professional sports venues makes it a perfect location for Hawker Beechcraft, McEwen told guests who gathered in the company's 26,000-square-foot hangar.

Smith, a pilot and airplane owner, said the new facilities are part of a growing cluster of aviation services that will help position Gateway airport for its role as one of the Southeast Valley's largest generator of well-paying jobs.

McEwen said that the hangar could hold up to 18 airplanes at a time for maintenance.

A second phase of construction will provide additional hangar space, administrative offices, back shops, a customer lobby and fully equipped customer offices, he said.