

November 6, 2007 - 11:53PM

Allegiant Air's ridership up 47 percent

Tony Natale, Tribune

Allegiant Air, the Las Vegas-based airline that serves 54 cities, including 12 from Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, said Tuesday it increased ridership by 47 percent in October compared with the same month last year.

The airline, a subsidiary of Allegiant Travel Co., reported that 213,429 passengers flew last month, compared with 145,218 in October 2006.

Ridership at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, meanwhile, continues to remain high, said airport spokesman Brian Sexton.

"We don't have an exact passenger count, but the terminal has been very, very busy since Allegiant started," said Sexton. He said that 325 more parking spaces are being added to the lot adjacent to the airport to accommodate Allegiant customers.

"You can't find an empty table at the Flight Deck Cafe," Sexton added.

Allegiant began service at Gateway on Oct. 25. It flies round-trip to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Peoria, Ill., Bellingham, Wash., Missoula, Mont., Stockton and Santa Maria, Calif., and Sioux Falls, S.D.

Sexton said the number of passengers and visitors is expected to increase even more in the next two weeks when Allegiant begins flying to Rockford, Ill., Fargo, N.D., Fort Wayne, Ind., Rapid City, S.D., Billings, Mont., and Green Bay, Wis.

The October passenger increase for Allegiant is part of a steady ridership climb of more than 48 percent for the third quarter of 2007 compared with 2006. Total passengers increased from 543,028 in 2006 to 805,878 during the third quarter of 2007.

Third quarter net income for 2007 was \$7 million compared with a loss of \$1.2 million in the prior-year period. Total revenue for the third quarter increased by more than 41 percent from \$60.9 million to \$86.3 million.

Allegiant, which started in 1997 and went public in 2006, expects ridership to increase even more during the first quarter of 2008, according to Maurice J. Gallagher Jr., chairman, CEO and president of the travel/airline company.