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Embraer opens service center at Gateway

By Ed Taylor
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OPENING MONDAY: Embraer's service center at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport consists of a hangar, workshops and office space.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Embraer, a Brazilian-based producer of executive jets and regional commercial aircraft, will officially cut the ribbon for its new \$10 million aircraft service center Monday at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

Consisting of a hangar, workshops and office space, the center will maintain the company's line of Legacy and Phenom corporate jets.

Although the complex is completed, the first airplanes are not likely to arrive until mid-October, said Bob Davis, chief operating officer of Embraer Executive Jet Services.

"The facility is complete and we are in the process of moving in and finalizing FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) certifications," he said.

An initial staff of about 14 people has been hired, and technicians have started training to obtain their certifications, he said.

The company plans to ramp up to about 70 employees within a couple of years, he said.

The center will perform scheduled and unscheduled maintenance for Embraer aircraft operators, primarily those based in the Western United States. The company also will be able to send road teams to make repairs on planes that are unable to fly to the center, Davis said.

The Gateway center is Embraer's only company-operated service center in the Western United States. Another is in Nashville, Tenn., and two others are under construction in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Windsor Locks, Conn., and are expected to open before the end of this year.

The company, founded in 1969, is one of the world's largest aircraft manufacturers with operations in Brazil,

Europe, Asia and the United States. The company entered the business aircraft market in 2001 with the introduction of the Legacy line of private jets. In May 2005, Embraer launched two new private aircraft, the Phenom 100 and Phenom 300, which are smaller than the Legacy. The first of more than 800 Phenoms pre-sold worldwide will be delivered to customers by the end of this year, the company said.

About 170 Legacies are flying in the United States.

Because the Phenoms are so new, most of the work at the Gateway center will be on Legacies, at least initially, Davis said.

The Phenom is selling well because it is relatively inexpensive - \$3 million versus \$27 million for the Legacy.

"The Phenom addresses the very light jet market, which has become very popular," Davis said.

Embraer is one of four aircraft maintenance centers under development at the southeast Mesa airport. Cessna plans to complete its center this winter, while CrownAir and Hawker Beechcraft are building facilities that are expected to open within 18 months to two years, said airport director Lynn Kusy.

The fact that Gateway has attracted so many maintenance operations is a tribute to the training programs offered at the nearby education campus, including Arizona State University Polytechnic and Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Kusy said.

"The university and community college will train the employees for these tenants. They're critical to our ability to attract this kind of tenant," he said.

Kusy said the airport's recruiters are attempting to attract more maintenance operators, but "nothing specific is in the works."



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