



## Falcon Field now 4th busiest general aviation airport

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Like a rock star on the rise, Mesa's Falcon Field Airport skyrocketed from the nation's 12th-busiest general aviation airport to number four in one year.

With takeoffs and landings soaring to 314,129 in 2007, the airport made a dramatic climb up the Federal Aviation Administration's charts from its position in 2006.

General aviation airports provide services for air charters, flight schools and privately owned aircraft.

Deer Valley Airport in Phoenix was the country's busiest general aviation facility in the country and Chandler Municipal ranked 11th.

"It's all the flight training," said Guy Lennon, Chandler Municipal's management assistant. "We have only one flight school at the airport but everybody in training uses all of the general aviation airports."

Falcon Field Director Corinne Nystrom and pilots attributed Falcon's increase of 65,048 in operations last year to the relocation of several flight schools to the airport and the influx of students from other countries.

"When Sabena Airline Training Center, Premier Helicopters and Regional Airline Academy came on board in 2007 that really helped our numbers a lot," she said. "I believe they have a waiting list too because, internationally, aviation is really growing. Sabena's clients include folks from India and they can't train pilots fast enough to keep up with that part of the world."

For nearly a year, the northeast Mesa airport has been a virtual construction zone as ground is prepared for scores of new hangars, several of them with offices along the airport's front door on McKellips Road just east of Greenfield Road.

The airport also landed a helicopter repair and restoration business this year, a major development as the historic airport takes on a new look and ushers in more privatization in its new business model.

Airport roads and taxiways have been reconfigured to enhance security, new businesses expand its list of aviation services and additional hangars are being added to alleviate a waiting list, Nystrom said.

She said the airport is now home to 95 businesses and more than 1,300 people work at the facility.

Pilot and businessman, Larry Ryerson, said the airport, developed in 1941 to train pilots for World War II, has exceeded his expectations.

"And now because of the shortage of pilots and the weak dollar the flight schools are full of international students," he said. "All of their countries are sending prospective pilots over here for training. And they spend a lot of money on groceries and buy a lot of gas while they're here."

Falcon Field Airport covers 600 acres, operates two runways and is home to more than 900 aircraft. The area surrounding the airport also is experiencing a surge in economic development from businesses whose owners see value in locating near a thriving airport with convenient freeway access, existing aerospace and technology companies and nearby housing, Nystrom said.