

Gateway airport envied for its development boom

Community gets credit for helping attract businesses

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At a recent aviation-business conference in Orlando, Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport staffers were confronted with the same question from a nationwide representation of their peers: "How are you doing it?"

The Mesa-based airport is not only the envy of the industry, but it is recognized as a national leader in the race for business development against the winds of economic despair.

"It's an exciting time for us because we know that other airports are having a decline," said Casey Denney, Gateway's deputy director. "Our community has put us in a good position to say yes to those companies building here."

The Gateway story at the National Business Aviation Association's three-day meeting was one of fortunate timing and success riding in the wake of decisions by three general-aviation giants opening for business on the former Air Force Base next year, Denny said.

All three companies are banking on access to a workforce trained at Chandler-Gilbert Community College and Arizona State University/Polytechnic campuses across the street from the airport.

Denny was referring to Cessna, Embraer and Hawker Beechcraft, which are building, moving into or have recently opened huge hangar and office complexes to conduct aircraft maintenance.

Cessna is nearing the final stages of its service center and is expected to start maintenance of Citation jets by June.

Hawker Beechcraft should also be open for business in the first half of the year.

Embraer expects to be fully open sometime in the first quarter of 2009.