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Ribbon cutting opens airport

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Posted: Nov. 5, 2007 10:12 a.m.

Updated: Nov. 5, 2007 10:12 a.m.

A ribbon cutting Monday marked the opening of the MidCoast Regional Airport at Wright Army Airfield.

It was a milepost in the special relationship of the area's civilian and military communities.

The state of the art facility replaces an aging, inadequate Liberty County Airport, and Fort Stewart is getting use of a 5,000-foot resurfaced runway in place of a deteriorating landing strip that had been closed to fixed wing aircraft.

Officials joke now about their idea of getting quick, simple approval of joint military/civilian use of Fort Stewart's airfield. Hinesville Mayor Tom Ratcliff, chairman of the airport project's Joint Management Board, tells of his enthusiasm on returning from a Washington meeting where the joint use concept had received a favorable reception.

"I said to Mr. Edwards (Hinesville City Manager Billy Edwards,) 'We need to draft that joint use document and Federal Express it back up to the Pentagon so we can get it signed.'"

It turned out that years of work and dozens of documents were required, but the effort has paid off in the \$10.3 facility which County Commission Chairman John McIver called "a highly visible, attractive way to move prospective clients and developers into our community."

County Administrator Joey Brown points out that the airport is opening "on time and under budget." This was accomplished despite some technical problems and the default of the paving contractor who was doing the runway, taxiways and aprons.

Of the three civilian airport partners — Hinesville, the Liberty County Development Authority and Liberty County — the LCDA has put MidCoast into immediate and effective use.

The authority's CEO, Ron Tolley, reported to the group at its meeting Tuesday that a team of executives from an industrial prospect had landed at MidCoast and were suitable impressed.

Especially so, Tolley said, since one member of the group had previously used the old Liberty County Airport and was "blown away with the difference here."

From the rocking chairs on the porch to Wi-Fi throughout, MidCoast offers an impressive array of facilities for general aviation travelers, industrial and business siting teams, pilots, support staff and others.

Though fully operational on both the civilian and military sides, MidCoast is working to stay up to date. Plans are under way to extend one of the runways to 6,500 feet and improvements will be made to the airport's aviation gas and jet fuel facilities.

A new access road is planned and the development authority is pursuing an industrial park to adjoin the airport.

And the paperwork never ends. Officials are now working on "retrocession" of the MidCoast property which will allow civilian law enforcement to share jurisdiction there.

MidCoast Regional Airport at Wright Army Airfield:

- state-of-the-art terminal building
- two fixed wing, two rotary wing runways
- crash truck, fire and rescue capabilities
- tower
- maintenance hangar
- T hangars, box hangars, customization available
- FBO Airport Business Solutions

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