

The Sentinel

... serving Greater Winston-Salem, North Carolina

• 50 Pages • Price 25 Cents • No. 83

Saturday Afternoon • July 30, 1983

Airport Confident It Will Find a Replacement for Piedmont

By TUCK THOMPSON
Sentinel Staff Reporter



WILLIAM RANKIN II

Officials at Smith Reynolds Airport, far from grieving over yesterday's announcement by Piedmont Airlines that it is ending service to the airport, say they are confident about finding an airline to take Piedmont's place within the next three months.

Piedmont announced late yesterday that it will end its five daily flights from Smith Reynolds on Oct. 30. The airline has been based at the airport since it was founded 36 years ago.

If a new carrier is not found by then the airport's only regular service will be four

daily flights by Sunbird Airlines, a commuter airline which links up with Piedmont flights in Charlotte.

Piedmont will continue to have its corporate headquarters here, along with general aviation, maintenance and training operations.

The flights were dropped for economic reasons. The company said that few people were flying out of Smith Reynolds, while the airline was operating 24 daily flights out of the Regional Airport 17 miles to the east.

William B. Rankin II, the airport manager at Smith Reynolds, said he was not surprised by Piedmont's departure and has expected

the move for several years.

Because Piedmont has been gradually cutting back on flights here since 1978, he views the action as a blessing in disguise.

"This has eliminated one of the major obstacles in negotiating with other carriers," he said. "They have said in the past, 'That's Piedmont's hometown.'"

Rankin said he expects to get word next week from one of three "no-frills" airlines, which use planes similar to Piedmont's Boeing 727 and 737 jets, now negotiating with the airport.

He would not identify the airlines but described the service offered as being "no-

frills" (meals, drinks, shuttle service, etc. not offered) to major airports such as New York and Atlanta. The airline must be approved to serve Smith Reynolds Airport by the federal Civil Aeronautics Board.

In fact, Rankin said the CAB has guaranteed his airport daily round trips to Atlanta and Washington, even to the point of providing subsidies.

Neal A. Bedinger, a county commissioner and ex-officio member of the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, confirmed that other airlines are interested in coming to Smith Reynolds.

"We have wondered when Piedmont

would leave. I'm not particularly surprised," he said. "It's been a slow, steady move — old Piedmont has finally outgrown its birthplace.

"But the market is right for a 'no-frills' airline," he said. "Now with Piedmont out of the picture, it's a whole new ball game — something could prove itself rapidly."

Smith Reynolds is in the midst of some improvements to its runways and taxiways and renovations at its terminal.

Donald F. McGuire, a Piedmont spokesman, said that the deregulation of the airline industry in 1978 "irreversibly dictated that

See Piedmont's, Page 2