

Rankin Leaving as Airport Manager

By TUCK THOMPSON
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William B. Rankin II, who as manager of Smith Reynolds Airport has spent the past 15 months struggling to restore commercial jet service there, has quit his \$31,000-a-year job to become manager of the Cedar Rapids Municipal Airport in Iowa.

Rankin, who has been manager here for seven years, recommended that Roger E. Morgan, Smith Reynolds' control tower chief, be appointed interim manager until the Airport Commission of Forsyth County can find a replacement.

The Cedar Rapids Airport Commission announced its decision to hire Rankin at a press conference yesterday afternoon. Rankin, who was selected from about 100 applicants, will assume his new job March 1. He will earn about \$38,000 a year.

"It's a good move in my career," Rankin said today. "It's the type of airport that's going to benefit my career over the long run."

The Cedar Rapids airport is served by three jet carriers — United, Ozark and Frontier airlines — and three commuter airlines. It recently announced plans for a \$50 million terminal expansion, Rankin said.

Rankin, 32, has been job-hunting for about a year, since Piedmont Airlines ended its commercial jet service at Smith Reynolds. The airport is now served only by a commuter,

Sunbird Airlines.

About Morgan, he said: "I think Roger's very capable. If he wants to pursue (the permanent job at manager), that's his business. He's in best position to take over as interim manager, but it's open to whoever wants to apply."

Rankin has long stressed the need for jet service here and worked to establish a task force to promote the airport.

"I don't foresee the struggle here will stop because I'm leaving," he said. "I know the task force (working to return jet service to the airport) will continue in its efforts, and I hope

that people in community will continue to pursue jet service, in addition to supporting Sunbird."

Matt R. Long Jr., chairman of the Forsyth County Airport Commission, said today that Rankin's resignation was expected, adding, "he's a professional and he's rising in his career."

"It's not a rat deserting a sinking ship," Long said. "He has the opportunity to move up, increase his salary, and he says the cost of living is not bad up there. His starting salary is considerably more than he's making here."

Long said the airport commission will discuss Rankin's successor at its

meeting next week.

Morgan, 51, will retire from the Federal Aviation Administration on March 1. He has expressed interest in applying for the airport manager's job.

Neal Bedinger, a former county commissioner who served on the airport commission for more than two years, described Rankin as a "very capable young man" who was looking for a chance to move up.

"He was disappointed that he couldn't get and retain jet service (at Smith Reynolds)," Bedinger said. "That probably was the primary reason for his leaving."