

# THE CHRONICLE

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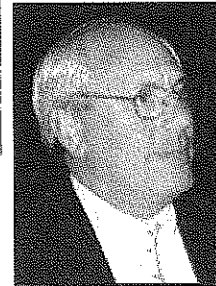
THURSDAY, May 7, 2009

## Residents, airport in tug-of-war

*Castle Heights feeling brunt of construction at Smith Reynolds*

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

Castle Heights resident Joe Rogers has lived in his home for nearly 38 years, but construction at nearby Smith Reynolds Airport has him thinking seriously about leaving the neighborhood for good.



*Kaplan*

"At 70 years of age, I think it's one of the greatest objectives that you have ... to be peaceful," commented Rogers.

Peace, and namely quiet, have been hard to come by in his neighborhood in recent months, Rogers says.

Construction began on the airport's main runway behind Rogers' property last November to extend the runway safety area and add an arresting system (which absorbs the

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Photo by Layla Farmer

*Emma Davenport looks at the piles of dirt at Smith Reynolds Airport that are visible from her living room window.*

# Airport

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forward momentum of a landing aircraft), according to Airport Director Larry Scantlin. The dirt and other materials that contractors are putting in place beyond the runway would stop an aircraft in the event of an emergency, similar to runaway truck ramps on mountains, he explained.

"That's for the safety of the people in the aircraft, but also for the people on the ground," he said.

The project was mandated, and funded almost entirely, by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as a safety measure, Scantlin says, but some residents who live close to the runway have their doubts.

"If an aircraft were to come down ... this would be an inferno that my wife and I couldn't survive," said Rogers, a retired US Airways employee.

He said that the swath of trees that bordered his property on the airport side prior to the construction provided a buffer from the noise of the planes. He also believed that they would provide an added layer of protection in the event of a crash. Ironically, Rogers believes that the airport safety improvements have actually made his property more vulnerable. He says he has voiced his concerns to airport officials, including Scantlin, but feels he is not being heard.

"They have treated us very badly. They've ignored us ... and not taken into consideration the safety (concerns) and the noise disturbances," he declared. "We're not treated intelligently in so many cases."

Neighbor Emma Davenport echoes many of Rogers' concerns.

"I feel as though we were disrespected," Davenport remarked. "We weren't shown any kind of consideration at all ... we knew nothing (about the construction)."

When she moved to the community, Davenport says she was not aware that an airport lay just beyond the woods that her house faces.

At one time, it would have been obvious to Davenport



Photo by Layla Fortner

**Joe and Shirley Rogers stand outside their home.**

that an airport was nearby. In its heyday, large commercial airliners, such as those that were operated by the now defunct Piedmont Airlines, landed at Smith Reynolds regularly. These days, mostly private airplanes and corporate jets use the airport, a fact that Davenport is all too familiar with.

"I can sit in my living room and see the planes on the runway. Nobody should have to live like this," she said. "... it's lowering the value of the property."

Attendance at monthly Castle Heights Neighborhood Association meetings has grown as residents become angrier and city and county officials work to address their concerns. But residents like Rogers and Davenport say they have received little relief despite all the attention.

"For my quality of life to be invaded like this is an insult... Here I am paying city and county taxes, and I'm not getting anything for all this money I'm paying but a whole lot of heartache," she commented. "If I was younger and was in good health, I would take what I wanted from this house, lock it up and never look back."

County Commissioner Ted Kaplan, who joined the Airport Commission late last year, says he takes the plight of residents seriously. He has visited the homes of several residents, including Rogers.

"They've got concerns, and we've got to listen - that's our job," he remarked.

The airport has obtained all the proper permits for the construction, and is well within its rights to bring construction right up to the property lines if it sees fit, Kaplan says, but he admits it poses a problem for those who live there.

"Some of these people, God bless 'em, they're right on the runway," he commented.

Kaplan says some of the trees will be replaced after construction is complete in the fall. He added that the Airport Commission also has plans to have an FAA noise study done, which could lead to added noise protection such as windows and extra insulation for nearby homes if the study shows noise levels are too high.

Despite the upheaval, Kaplan believes some good has already come from the construction.

"The best thing about all this is we do have a relationship with the the neighborhoods around the airport now," he stated. "They know the individuals they need to contact, the phone lines are open ... and there's a different attitude at the airport."

*The Castle Heights Neighborhood Association meets the third Monday of each month at 11 a.m. at Solid Rock Baptist Church 3010 Carver School Rd. The Airport Commission meets the 3rd Tuesday of every month at Smith Reynolds Airport. Both meetings are open to the public.*