



2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2016

# AVIATION BUSINESS OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

**JetSuite's  
Sweet Spot:  
High-Value Charter,  
Affordably Priced**

### NATA AIRPORT EXECUTIVE PARTNERSHIP AWARD: MARK R. DAVIDSON, A.A.E.



Mr. Mark R. Davidson, A.A.E., Airport Director at Smith Reynolds Airport, Winston-Salem, North Carolina is the recipient of the NATA Airport Executive Partnership Award. This award recognizes an airport manager for his or her efforts to foster relationships between aviation businesses

and airport operators. Mr. Davidson's leadership promotes true partnership with airport tenants and businesses. He strives to understand and improve the day-to-day operations of the FBOs, MROs and other aviation businesses at Smith Reynolds. His advancement of relations between the airport's businesses and the Airport Commission of Forsyth County returned Smith Reynolds Airport to profitability—in turn, making the facility a key contributor to the Winston-Salem aviation industry and local community.

Smith Reynolds Airport is located just minutes from downtown Winston-Salem, a community with a rich aviation history. The first paved airfield was built in 1927 in anticipation of a visit from Charles Lindbergh, who landed in town on October 14, 1927 during his Spirit of St. Louis tour. The airport was expanded in 1933 as a Civil Works Administration project, and renamed Smith Reynolds Airport in 1942. The Airport Commission of Forsyth County was established in 1949, and still oversees its operations today, some 67 years later.

That history is important to Davidson, but he says he is more focused on the airport's future.

"They had hit rock bottom right before I arrived," Davidson said of the dire situation he walked in on. "The largest anchor tenant had just declared bankruptcy and the airport was losing \$50,000 a month. We had to get creative, fast, to bring in some new tenants, work with our existing tenants, reinvest in our infrastructure, and get things moving again. I'm happy to report that we're doing quite well now."

The turnaround was practically immediate.

In 2010, his first year on the job, Davidson increased the airport's income 55 percent while decreasing its expenses by 10 percent. He has now overseen over \$15 million in capital improvement projects at the

airport, and negotiated multi-million-dollar lease agreements with Landmark Aviation, Piedmont Propulsion, and North State Aviation for FBO and MRO operations.

In 2012, after taking care of the airport's business in the short term, he began shifting focus to implementation of a 20-year Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan, taking a long view of development "to maintain a safe, efficient, economical, and environmentally-acceptable airport for Forsyth County" far into the foreseeable future. The airport, home of Signature Flight Support and Piedmont Flight Training, now boasts 19 other tenants, with more being added by the month.

Davidson cites North State Aviation as a particular success story during his tenure. The MRO company works on Boeing 727, 737, 757, and 767 aircraft, and is growing rapidly; Davidson helped North State Aviation obtain incentive grants in its start-up phase, and helped shepherd it into one of the airport's vacant hangar facilities.

"North State Aviation started with eight employees, shortly after I started, and we worked with them, leasing them a bit of the building at a time," he says. "They now lease the entire facility, and have close to 400 employees."

Davidson studied Aviation Management at Jacksonville University, where he later followed up with a master's degree in Business Administration, and started his career with the Jacksonville Port Authority as Airport Manager at Herlong, and then at Cecil Field. He moved to Vail, Colorado for a brief stint as Director of Aviation at the Eagle County Regional Airport before accepting a position as Vice President at Airport Business Solutions, from 2003 to 2010. The opportunity to turn Smith Reynolds Airport around for the Airport Commission of Forsyth County was one he couldn't resist and one for which he has turned out to be uniquely suited.

"From my experience in managing and consulting, I have learned that every airport is different," Davidson said. "Every tenant has different needs and requires an environment to grow and flourish. As an Airport Director, it is my job to create the best environment for economic growth, while, at the same time, investing in the infrastructure for all to use."