



Sentinel Photo by Alice Green

RALPH QUINLAN: "We're going to be providing essential air service where the trunk carriers are not going."

Sunbird Flies From Winston

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Sunbird Airlines' inaugural flight from Smith Reynolds Airport lifted off at 7:12 a.m. today — 12 minutes late — giving Winston-Salem its first regularly scheduled commercial air service on an airline other than Piedmont in 19 years.

officials, local travel agents and television news crews boarded a new Cessna 402C to ride Flight 151 to Charlotte. Al Clay, who will be running Sunbird's ticket desk here, said the airline's first paying customer from Winston-Salem reserved a seat on an 8:45 a.m. flight to Raleigh/Durham.

"That's a pretty airplane," said a beaming Matt R. Long Jr., chairman of the Airport

Commission of Forsyth County, as the orange, white and yellow twin-engine plane rolled away from the terminal.

The 11-month-old airline, based in Denver, N. C., is concentrating on linking small and medium-sized airports in the mid-Atlantic Southern states with regional air traffic hubs, such as Raleigh/Durham and Charlotte.

"Down the road, we're going to be providing essential air service where the trunk carriers are not going," said Sunbird President Ralph Quinlan this morning.

Sunbird is now operating two round trips daily between Winston-Salem and Charlotte and one between here and Raleigh/Durham. The Charlotte flights connect with service to Hickory and, after June 1, Fayetteville, Wilmington, Kingston and Tri-Cities, Tenn. The Raleigh/Durham flight connects with service to Rocky Mount/Wilson. The airline also serves Roanoke Rapids and Norfolk, Va., and has plans to expand throughout the Carolinas, Virginia and Tennessee in coming years.

Quinlan said the airline is hoping to capitalize on gasoline prices and discount connecting fares to attract customers in Winston-Salem by saving them a drive to the Regional Airport outside Greensboro. "Businessmen here in Winston-Salem can get to the airport so easily," he said. "If he's going to the northeast, he can fly to Raleigh, and if he's going to the south or the west, he can fly to Charlotte."

Under Civil Aeronautics Board regulations, airlines can offer substantial discounts on a joint fare between a commuter flight, such as those Sunbird offers, and a flight on a trunk airline to a major city.

Sunbird now owns a fleet of 10 Cessna 402C craft, which can carry a two-person crew and eight passengers and, according to Quinlan, have more instrumentation than some of Piedmont's large planes.

Present fares on Sunbird flights from Winston-Salem are as follows: Charlotte, \$44; Fayetteville, \$65; Hickory, \$47; Kingston, \$69; Raleigh/Durham, \$57; Rocky Mount/Wilson, \$55; Tri-Cities, Tenn., \$57; and Wilmington, \$69.