

Airport on hunt for new carrier

■ Smith Reynolds' chief:
Early departure of CCAir
gives time to find service

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Edwin R. Cox Jr., the director of Smith Reynolds Airport, is optimistic he can find a passenger carrier that can better serve Winston-Salem, enabling the airport to continue to receive a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration for its passenger service.

"This happened so early in the year, so we have time to get a new carrier in place,"

Cox said.

CCAir Inc., which is based in Charlotte and owned by US Airways Express, notified Cox last week it is pulling out of Smith Reynolds Airport on Jan. 16. The regional carrier that transported about 500 passengers a month from Winston-Salem to Charlotte said it suffered too many financial losses to maintain service here.

CCAir, which connected at the Charlotte/Douglas International Airport to US Airways flights, ran three daily flights which were used mostly by commuters.

The airline competed against commuter airlines from Piedmont Triad International Airport and even some out of Raleigh-Durham International Airport, said Mike Holcomb, the scheduling director for CCAir and US Airways Express.

CCAir couldn't hold up against the convenience factor of the other airlines that offered more flights, he said.

"We had a few businesses that were loyal to us, but even with that, Greensboro is so convenient and had so many nonstop flights," Holcomb said.

US AIRWAYS EXPRESS files out of Piedmont Triad, and last year, Metrojet, also owned by US Airways, expanded its round trip commuter service out of RDU.

The FAA has given Smith Reynolds about \$500,000 a year in an entitlement grant for having at least 10,000 passengers depart from the airport, said Kathleen Bergen, an FAA spokeswoman.

The money is received two fiscal years after it's awarded, she said.

Since 1996, Smith Reynolds has received more than \$6 million in entitlement grants and also in discretionary grants — federal money handed out on a priority basis. The airport has used the money to build and improve hangars and taxiways and also

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complete three phases of a pavement and terminal study, Bergen said. The airport has until October 2000 to get another passenger carrier and have at least 10,000 passengers fly, or it will not get the entitlement grant for fiscal year 2002.

Cox said he and the Airport Commission of Forsyth County will be able to find another airline to fill CC

Air's spot. "It's easy to get another carrier when you don't have one and have had one with such limited service."

The airline employed one part-time and four full-time crew members, Holcomb said.

The airport's three rental-car agencies — Budget Car & Truck Rental, Hertz Rent a Car and Avis Rent a Car all have told Cox that losing CCAir won't affect their businesses — which is filled mostly by those flying on private or corporate planes or by local rentals, he said. "CCAir only had a handful of passengers that used the rental agencies," Cox said.

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