

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Aviation firm to bring 300 jobs to Winston-Salem

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WINSTON-SALEM — A new startup aviation maintenance firm at Smith Reynolds Airport in Winston-Salem will become fully operational next month with plans to hire more than 300 new employees and begin work on Boeing 737 aircraft within 30 to 60 days.

Officials with NS Aviation, the new company, said this week that its long-term goal is to provide maintenance service for as many as 50 planes each year from Smith Reynolds Airport.

NS Aviation will target major commercial airline companies as well as "any corporate operators of 737 aircraft," Tom

Chappell, company vice president of business development and former senior director of purchasing and contracts at Continental Airlines.

The company's ambitious plans will breathe new life into the small airport on the east side of Winston-Salem, which has struggled financially since the loss of Pace

Airlines, which once employed a work force of roughly 400 before going bankrupt in 2009. The new venture is led by Charles Creech, former president of Pace Airlines and current president of NS Aviation.

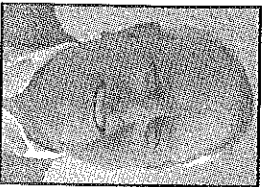
NS Aviation, now on a month-to-month

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lease at the airport, will look locally to recruit certified aircraft maintenance mechanics who previously worked for companies such as Pace Airline and U.S. Airways, which once operated a landing-gear facility from Smith Reynolds. Hiring local talent will help NS Aviation reach its goal of adding 308 new full-time jobs over four years at an average annual wage of \$42,402.



Creech

Creech said he's seen plenty of interest from potential candidates.

"We're very excited," he said. "We've had people stop by and see us. Just last week we had three people who were out in the lobby asking if they could fill out applications."

NS Aviation's strategy has been con-

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tingent upon the financial incentives and support from several state and local entities, including the state Department of Commerce, Winston-Salem Business Inc. and the Airport Commission of Forsyth County.

For example, Forsyth County commissioners were to hold a public hearing Thursday on a \$300,000 One North Carolina grant to help NS Aviation develop an operation at Smith Reynolds.

"I think everybody wants those jobs and to get people back to work as quickly as we can," said County Manager Dudley Watts. "I have heard county commissioners express concern about losing those jobs. They paid well, they were skilled jobs."

The vote on incentives was scheduled to come after this newspaper's deadline this week.

Growing cluster

Meanwhile, the emergence of NS Aviation will add to the growing aviation cluster in the Triad. Greensboro-based Timco Aviation Services,



Chappell

which now has about 1,800 employees, is expanding with 500 new jobs in Davidson County to support growing demand for renovating existing aircraft with new seats and interiors (see related story, page 7).

NS Aviation, which received certification from the Federal Aviation Administration in December, will provide everything from heavy maintenance checks to major alterations on 737 aircraft.

John Kasarda, an aviation expert and director of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan-Flagler Business School, said the addition of NS Aviation will provide greater visibility for the Triad's maintenance, repair and overhaul industry.

"I think it will create a critical mass," he said, adding that its success will hinge on the relationships it has with airlines.

NS Aviation officials said they will leverage their long-term relationships to win contracts.

"The aviation industry is big business, but it's still a small world," said Russell Kota, NS Aviation's vice president of maintenance who previously held that position with Pace. "If you want long-term business, you have to tell them what you're going to do, tell them how much it's going to cost, when it's going to be done, and you live by those rules. And if anything changes, you let your customers know."

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