ALICE DOESN’T LIVE HERE ANYMORE
MEET THE NEW ALICE INTERNATIONAL

By Rick Davenport
Texas A&M Transportation Institute

The Alice International Airport (KALI) has a rich and storied history, dating back to its role in training naval pilots for World War II. Since then, and after the city and county became owners, the airport nearly became invisible.

“I would say most people don’t even know we have an airport, or where it’s located,” says Charles Brazzell, the 77-year-old airport manager, who left his hometown decades ago but returned to Alice and is now on his third career. Eight years ago, Brazzell became Alice’s first full-time, on-site airport manager.

“The airport has not been a big priority, but that seems to be changing very quickly. I’m proud to see all the improvements here, and others are too,” he says. “I have officials with the city and county coming to see our facility for the very first time.”

continued on pg. 3
FAA 3RD CLASS MEDICAL REFORM APPEARS POISED TO MOVE FORWARD

Congressional support for the Pilot’s Bill of Rights 2 continues to grow. As of Dec. 10, 2015, 69 senators and 151 members of the House of Representatives and 40 percent of the entire congress had signed on as co-sponsors of the bill. On December 9, the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation approved S. 571, better known as the Pilot’s Bill of Rights 2, bringing significant third-class medical reform one big step closer to reality.

In order to secure approval in the Senate, a few changes in the bill were necessary. New pilots would be required to obtain FAA medical certification one time in order to establish a benchmark for their health. For private pilots who have a valid medical certificate, either regular or special issuance, within 10 years from the date when the bill is signed into law, no further FAA medical will be required. The only ongoing requirements will be to take a no cost online medical education course every two years and visit your personal physician once every four years, noting the visit in your logbook. No requirement will exist to report the outcome of this visit to the FAA.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and the Experimental Aircraft Association fully support the Pilot’s Bill of Rights 2, including these recent modifications, as do I. FAA 3rd class medical reform has never looked more promising. If the bill does become law, it will have a major positive impact on the general aviation industry.

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND THE 2016 TEXAS AVIATION CONFERENCE

Registration is now underway for the 2016 Texas Aviation Conference. This year’s conference will be held March 9-11, at La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa in Montgomery, Texas. I’m proud to announce that this year’s keynote speaker is Retired U.S. Navy and NASA Astronaut (Gemini 9, Apollo 10, and Apollo 17) Captain Gene Cernan. More information, including the tentative agenda, is available in pages 7-10 of this issue. You may register online at http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tac16/. Hope to see you there!
The finishing touches are underway on a $5.3 million construction project that has transformed an outdated facility into a revitalized and modern general aviation airport complete with rehabilitated runways, new lighting, reconstructed taxiways with lighting, a new fuel apron, airfield signage, a precision approach path indicator... the list goes on. The airport even has a pilot's lounge with computers, showers, a courtesy car and complimentary hot dogs.

So how did all this happen?

Brazzell says a lot of the credit has to go to Barbara Reaves, head of Grant Development with the City of Alice.

“Years ago our lighting system went out after a lightning strike,” Brazzell explains. “That’s when Reaves began talking with TxDOT about our needs, which led to these grant funds being available.”

Heading up the Alice project for TxDOT was Project Manager Eusebio Torres, who is pleased that the airport is receiving more attention. “Alice is a case in which most people did not realize what they had until the reconstruction project got underway. I think it opened their eyes to new potential,” says Torres.

Torres urges other Texas airports to contact TxDOT Aviation for potential grant funding opportunities. He explained that in most of the work at Alice, grant funds amounted to 90 percent of the costs, with the city and county splitting the remaining 10 percent.

**Recent Updates Impress New Visitors**

Newly elected Jim Wells County Judge Pedro “Pete” Trevino recently visited the airport, and was impressed. “I did not realize how big it was and that it was such a jewel. It’s a real diamond in the rough and no one knows about it,” says Trevino. “I really think the new Alice International Airport will entice future development.”

Currently, the oil industry, hunters and the Navy are Alice’s biggest customers. Thanks to the renovations, officials expect to start seeing new users.

Alice International Airport averages 26,000 take-offs and landings each year. However, with money shortages the airport ran into hard times. A rehabilitation project was attempted years ago, but ended when money ran out.

With few choices in the region, and the fact that Alice has a 6,000 foot runway, pilots used the airport out of necessity.

“I really think that pilots will want to come here now, not because they have to,” says Brazzell. “And when they see all the improvements, word will spread quickly.” He’s extremely pleased with the work his new maintenance supervisor, Noe Asevedo, is doing to keep all 562 acres neat and clean, as well as keeping the machinery running smoothly.

Brazzell and others are discussing a fly-in or celebration to introduce the public to Alice’s new airport. They take pride in the improvements and will continue this stride in the future.

“Not only is Alice International safer and nicer, we have the best customer service in all of South Texas,” Brazzell says. “Everything here has changed.”

For more information about the Alice airport, visit [http://www.airnav.com/airport/kali](http://www.airnav.com/airport/kali).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airport</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lamesa Municipal Airport</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
<td>Install automated weather observing system (AWOS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Oak County Airport</td>
<td>$1,310,000</td>
<td>Rehabilitate and mark Runway 13-31 and stub taxiway; reconstruct apron;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rehabilitate and mark hangar access taxiway; construct new hangar access</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>taxiway; replace medium intensity runway lights 13-31; install precision</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>approach path indicators-2 Runway 13-31; install lighted wind cone and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>segmented circle; upgrade electrical vault equipment/regulators; replace</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>signage; and memorandum of agreement with FAA flight check PAPI’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatesville City Airport</td>
<td>$270,000</td>
<td>Design and construction services to rehabilitate and mark Runway 17-35;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reconstruct apron, rehabilitate north and south hangar access taxiway and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>install wildlife proof fencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rusty Allen Airport/Lago Vista</td>
<td>$624,160</td>
<td>Rehabilitate and mark Runway 16-34; reconstruct hangar access taxiway;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rehabilitate taxiways and apron; widen taxiway filet on Northeast corner;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and relocate/install windsock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County Airport/</td>
<td>$603,360</td>
<td>Reconstruct east hangar access taxi lane; rehabilitate and mark connecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Vernon</td>
<td></td>
<td>taxiway, west hangar access taxi lane and apron; drainage improvements,</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>regrade ditches and install concrete RCP headwalls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleveland Municipal Airport</td>
<td>$1,090,320</td>
<td>Rehabilitate and mark Runway 16-34; rehabilitate main apron and hangar</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>access taxiway; rehabilitate and mark parallel and cross taxiways; and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>drainage improvements in hangar area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pecos Municipal Airport</td>
<td>$1,428,940</td>
<td>Construct hangar and hangar access taxiway pavement; install 12' LED wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cone with LED obstruction light; replace perimeter fence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garner Field/Uvalde</td>
<td>$1,077,820</td>
<td>Construct apron west side portions; extend westside apron, concrete swale</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>and concrete ditch channel to ponding area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wharton Regional Airport</td>
<td>$1,315,285</td>
<td>Construct 2-unit box and hangar access taxiway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midland Airpark</td>
<td>$882,860</td>
<td>Construct two 6-unit T hangars and improve drainage for two new T-hangars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaines County Airport/Seminole</td>
<td>$974,430</td>
<td>Replace medium intensity runway lights and taxiway exit lights; replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>electrical vault, service modifications and vault equipment and replace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>airside signage.</td>
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AVIATION ART CONTEST WORK FEATURED AT LOVE FIELD

By Chris Sasser
Texas A&M Transportation Institute

Visitors to Dallas Love Field Airport were recently treated to a display of artwork from talented young Texans throughout the state. The art pieces were selected from the annual aviation art contest hosted by the Aviation Division.

Selected pieces were on display from August to October featured as a rotating exhibit for the Love Field Art Program.

“The travelers really enjoyed the aviation art exhibit,” said Guy Bruggeman, Art and Programming Coordinator at Dallas Love Field Airport. “When I walked through the corridor (where the pieces were displayed), I noticed people stopped to look at the artwork from these talented kids. This exhibit really tied in well with what we are trying to accomplish with our program. The newly renovated Dallas Love Field Airport is a spectacular gateway to the City of Dallas, showcasing public artwork.”

The pieces on display were part of the 2015 art contest. Participants are judged in three categories between the ages of 6–18. 850 students from 40 schools submitted entries in the Texas challenge of the International Aviation Art Contest. In the 2015 competition, students created posters about the FAI’s World Air Games in Dubai. Awards are presented to the winners at the annual Texas Aviation Conference.

“It was certainly very exciting to participate in the Love Field Art Program,” said Aviation Division employee Becky Vick, who coordinates the statewide art contest. “We have a lot of talented kids who participated, and this was a great opportunity to share their work with people throughout the state and country. Hopefully we can do this again next year.”

The Love Field Public Art Program features themes related to the history and legacy of Dallas Love Field Airport. The artwork represents the outstanding contributions of artists from Dallas and beyond, enriching the experience of airport visitors and showcasing new additions to the City of Dallas Public Art Collection.

For more information about the aviation art contest, visit http://www.txdot.gov/inside-txdot/division/aviation/aviation-art.html. ◆
Leonard “Len” Miller, 99 of Quanah, Texas died on Monday, Nov. 9, 2015, in Quanah, Texas.

Len was born Saturday, Jan. 8, 1916 in Walbash County, Indiana; he was the son of the late Otto Miller and the late Elsa Ridgeway Miller. He married Melba Jean Haynes on Nov. 5, 1946 in Lockett, Texas. She preceded him in death on Jan. 30, 2007.

Len first soloed in 1940 and bought his first airplane, a 40-horsepower Taylorcraft, in 1941. He obtained his private and commercial license in 1942. He served in the US Army Air Corp 1943-1946 during WWII. He was a pilot trainer and flight instructor for Victory Field in Vernon, TX.

In 1953 he moved to Odell to farm. He tried his hand at selling cars, driving a truck, hauling hay and farming, but none of that could scratch the flying itch. He decided to be a crop duster and bought his first spray plane. He was owner and operated Odell Flying service from 1960-1998. Miller was also manager of Quanah Airport for 35 years, 1980 until his death. He was also a member of the Odell School Board.

In 1996 he was awarded the TxDOT Airport Manager of the Year and in 2013 received the Texas Aviator of the Year at the Texas Aviation Conference at the age of 97.

Among his many aviation achievements include flying over 200 different types of aircraft and refurbishing many airplanes. Len also shared his passion of aviation by teaching over 3,000 students how to fly, including his wife, two brothers, one daughter, and all five of his grandsons.

“Texas has lost a true legend in the aviation community,” said TxDOT Aviation Division Director David Fulton. “It was an honor for us to award him the 2013 Texas Aviator of the Year Award. His contributions to general aviation in Texas cannot be overstated. It was a sad day to hear of his passing.”

Len Miller surrounded by his family at the 2013 Texas Aviation Conference where he was awarded the 2013 Texas Aviator of the Year.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS
March 9-11, 2016
La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa
600 La Torretta Blvd.
Montgomery, TX 78356

Conference Registration
Pre-registration is recommended and will help us in planning and preparing a better conference. If you pre-register, your name tag and program packet will be ready when you arrive at the hotel. The fee is $200 through February 8, 2016. A $50 late fee will be added to registrations received after February 8, 2016. A $75 fee will be added for all on-site registrations. You are encouraged to register online. If paying by check or money order, register online and make payable to TTI-Avtn2016 Event Management Planning (EM&P) at the address listed below. Only cancellations received in writing by EM&P by 5:00 p.m. CST on February 8, 2016 will be refunded, less $50 handling fee. No refunds will be issued after this date. You may pay your registration fee by check, money order, or credit card. No Purchase Orders. The registration fee covers conference handouts, break refreshments, Wednesday’s get acquainted reception, Thursday’s breakfast, luncheon and awards banquet; and Friday’s breakfast. Note: TxDOT employees are exempt from the registration fee, but must register in advance.

Hotel Reservations
The La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa is holding a block of rooms for our use at $132 group rate. After February 14, 2016, rooms are subject to availability and may be at a higher rate. To receive this rate, please call the La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa at 936-448-3033. Remember to mention the Texas Aviation Conference to receive the conference rate. You may also reserve your room online. The hotel has both complimentary self-parking and valet parking for $12. Please visit their website for additional information.

Special Activities
On Wednesday our 19th Annual Golf Tournament will be held at the La Toretta Golf Course. There will be a shotgun start at 10:30 a.m. All golfers must be registered to attend the conference. A get acquainted reception is planned for Wednesday evening from 5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Plan to join us on Thursday evening for the Awards Banquet. All registered participants are encouraged to attend. Guest tickets are also available for $40. Tickets can be purchased online when you register for the conference.

Special Needs
In compliance with ADA requirements, participants with special needs can be reasonably accommodated by contacting EM&P phone: 979-862-1219, toll free 888-550-5577, or fax 979-862-1225, at least 5 working days prior to the conference.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the Aviation Division at 1-800-68-PILOT.
**2016 Tentative Conference Program**

**Wednesday, March 9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Golf Tournament at La Torretta Golf Course</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Exhibitor Set-up</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Registration/Check-in</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Exhibits Open</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Get Acquainted Reception</strong></td>
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**Thursday, March 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Registration Desk Open</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Continental Breakfast (in Exhibit Hall)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m. – 8:50 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Welcoming Address</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:50 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Introduction of Aviation Advisory Committee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>State of the Aviation Division Address</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Business Aviation in Texas</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Coffee Break</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.</td>
<td><strong>Keynote Address</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Captain Gene Cernan Retired U.S. Navy and NASA Astronaut (Gemini 9, Apollo 10, and Apollo 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Luncheon</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Texas Airports Council Meeting**

- Approval of minutes from previous meeting
- Election of 2016 Officers
- TAC Goals for 2016
- General Discussion

**Afternoon Breakout Sessions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>I: Airport Management</strong></td>
<td><strong>II: TxDOT AVN Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Management Program</strong></td>
<td><strong>III: TBD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Matt Quick, Coffman Associates</td>
<td>Kensley Greuter, SWCA</td>
<td>Sarah Brammell, Environmental Resource Solutions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>I: eGrants: An Introduction to the New Grant Management Software (For Airport Sponsors)</strong></td>
<td><strong>II: Developing Effective Stakeholder Relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>III: TBD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.</td>
<td>TBD, TxDOT, Aviation Division Staff</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong> (in Exhibit Hall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>III: Pavement Maintenance Guidelines for General Aviation Airports: The Development of a Decision Tool for Airport Managers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tom Freeman, Texas A&amp;M Transportation Institute</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong> (in Exhibit Hall)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2016 TENTATIVE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

MONDAY, MARCH 7

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Texas Airports Council Meeting
• Approval of minutes from previous meeting
• Election of 2016 Officers
• TAC Goals for 2016
• General Discussion

AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
I: Airport Manager’s Round Table
II: TxDOT AVN Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Management Program
Matt Quick, Coffman Associates
Kensley Greuter, SWCA
Sarah Brammell, Environmental Resource Solutions
Rick Jones, Mead & Hunt
III: TBD

3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.
Break

3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.
I: eGrants: An Introduction to the New Grant Management Software (For Airport Sponsors)
TBD, TxDOT, Aviation Division Staff
II: Developing Effective Stakeholder Relationships
TBD
III: Pavement Maintenance Guidelines for General Aviation Airports: The Development of a Decision Tool for Airport Managers
Tom Freeman, Texas A&M Transportation Institute

4:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Break

4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
I: RAMP Session
Megan Caffall, RAMP Program Manager, TxDOT, Aviation Division
II: eGrants: An Introduction to the New Grant Management Software (For Consultants and Contractors)
TBD, TxDOT Staff

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

8:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Exhibits and Registration Desk Open

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.
Breakfast Buffet

9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.
Airport Compliance Issues
Bill Gunn, TxDOT, Aviation Division

9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Washington Update
Greg Principato, President and CEO, National Association of State Aviation Officials

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
TxDOT/DOT-FAA AIP Program and Listening Session
Dave Fulton, Director, TxDOT, Aviation Division
TBD, Texas Airports Development Office, FAA Southwest Region

11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
Prize Drawings

6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Manager’s Round Table
I: Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Management Program
Coffman Associates
SWCA
Environmental Resource Solutions
Mead & Hunt

Awards Banquet
General Aviation Airport Manager of the Year, Most Improved Airport, General Aviation Airport of the Year, Reliever Airport or Reliever Airport Manager of the Year, RAMP Coordinator of the Year and Aviation Art Contest Winners
REGISTRATION

Register online at http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tac16/

You are encouraged to register online. If paying by check or money order, register online and make check payable to TTI-Avtn2016, and send to Event Management and Planning, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University System, 3135 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-3135. Phone: 979-862-1219 and Fax 979-862-1225. NO PURCHASE ORDERS ACCEPTED. ONLY VISA, MASTER CARD AND DISCOVER CREDIT CARDS WILL BE ACCEPTED. ONLY CHECKS FROM U.S. BANKS ARE ACCEPTED. TxDOT employees are exempt from the registration fee, but must register online. If paying by check or money order, you may register online and then mail your payment. Only cancellations received in writing to EM&P by 5:00 p.m. Feb. 8, 2016 will be refunded less a $50 handling fee.

NOTE: If you are taking a guest to the awards banquet that is not registered please include an additional $40.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

At the Texas Aviation Conference held each spring, the Texas Department of Transportation’s Aviation Division presents four customer service awards. Award nominations for the 2016 Texas Aviation Conference being held at the La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa in Montgomery, TX, are requested for the following categories:

• Most Improved Airport
• Airport of the Year
• General Aviation Airport Manager of the Year
• Reliever Airport of the Year or Reliever Airport Manager of the Year

Nominations will be accepted until Feb. 8, 2016 and may be submitted by mail to:

Becky Vick
Aviation Division
Texas Department of Transportation
125 E. 11th St.
Austin, Texas 78701
or
e-mail to: becky.vick@txdot.gov or wingtips@tamu.edu.
ANDREWS COUNTY AIRPORT WINS 2015 AIRPORT OF THE YEAR AWARD

By Chris Sasser
Texas A&M Transportation Institute

In the far reaches of West Texas just north of Odessa and nearly on the New Mexico border is a sprawling airport located on the edge of town: Andrews County Airport (E11). Though one has to travel a long way to reach this airport, its importance in the community and surrounding area cannot be understated.

Over the last five years, through the leadership of the airport manager and key local government officials, the airport has made significant and meaningful changes to both the airside and landside environments in response to the changing role of the airport and the needs of its users.

Robert Vargas has been the airport manager since 2010. His background includes serving in the military, working for the county as a jailer and a 911 operator. He was deployed to Iraq in 2008, and when he returned to civilian life he found that a desk job no longer suited him.
“I just realized that I could no longer sit in an office all day anymore,” said Vargas. “I saw an ad in our paper for airport manager and decided to dive in even though I didn’t know where it would go. It was a quality of life issue. I really felt like this was a challenge I wanted to take on. Having my military background gave me a lot of confidence, which you need when facing a commissioner’s court. I’m grateful they gave me the job, and I’m very content and happy with where I am.”

No doubt the local government officials and pilot community are pleased as well with his leadership. When the airport development plan called for the closing of the third runway (11-29) to make room for the changes, Vargas solicited input from local pilots who used the runway on particularly challenging windy days. The county elected to maintain its third runway using 100 percent local funding.

When Vargas initially took over as airport manager, he immediately began work on landside improvements that had been neglected.

“The infrastructure was out of code and compliance,” said Vargas. “The electrical system in the hangars was one of the biggest issues. People were running their own electrical and nothing was to code. So my first project, through a TxDOT RAMP grant, was to make sure our electrical systems were in compliance. Also, my assistant, Corbin Stewart did a lot of the leg work during the 2012 CIP project. On a day-to-day basis he helps keep me organized and does a fine job maintaining the airfield through mowing operations and self-inspections. I know I couldn’t have made things work without him.”

This initial project sparked a renewed interest from local officials in the airport activities.

**Oil Boom Sparked Growth**

During the oil boom, the airport’s region saw tremendous business growth in the oil and gas industry, which translated directly into increased activity airport. Fortunately, the airport through the guidance of Andrews County Judge Richard Dolenger, the Commissioner’s Court, local business leaders, the economic development corporation, and Chamber of Commerce prepared itself for the growth by taking proactive measures to ensure the viability of the airport well into the future.

Three of the most important projects were:
- The construction of a 120 x 130 corporate hangar;
- A new airport development plan and airport layout drawing; and
- Acquisition of three key parcels of land to facilitate public partnership and private hangar development.

Additional projects included pavement rehabilitation to the runways, installation of a PAPI 4 on RW 16-34 and RW 02-20, MIRL replacement for RW 16-34, parallel taxiway reconstruction, drainage improvements and construction of a concrete fueling apron. These investments in the airport total more than $3 million.

“The projects speak to the efforts that the community continues to make to ensure viability of the airport and illustrate the importance placed on the airport with respect to current and future business development within the county,” said TxDOT Airport Planner Daniel Benson.

The centerpiece of the projects is the new corporate hangar, which has office space with restrooms and shower facilities. From the highway, the brick façade resembles an office building rather than a hangar. The hangar and office space were recently completed and ready for move-in.

Though the energy sector market has slowed, the airport is still busy and planning for the future. Vargas is working to find the right client for the new hangar and even hopes to have an airplane viewing area for local families to visit and see what’s going on at the airport.

“Robert has really done a great job,” said Andrews County Commissioner and local pilot Jeneane Anderegg. “He is responsive and listens to the needs of the pilot community and has the vision to see projects completed.”
The first time I met Upton County Judge, Bill Eyler, at the 2015 Texas Aviation Conference, it left quite an impression.

“We used to have an airport that was in such poor shape a fellow would not have crash landed there,” exclaimed Judge Eyler when I introduced myself as the Wingtips editor. “I bet it would make a good story for your newsletter.”

I agreed and several months later ventured out to far West Texas to visit with Judge Eyler and airport manager, Carl Absher.

The Upton County Airport (E48), located in McCamey, about 50 miles south of Odessa, was established in 1940 as a DC-3 training base. Over the years, the hangars and barracks were torn down or destroyed by fire. Other than the occasional passenger and freight service operations, the airport endured little use and became nearly desolate—particularly after a lightning strike in the early 90’s that destroyed the airport’s lighting controls, rendering the facility only operable for day use.

“Between 1995 and 2012, the airport was not well maintained, and flights in and out became few and far between,” said Absher. “The runway and taxiway had severe vegetation encroachment. One taxiway was basically loose recycled asphalt pavement.”
The situation at the airport started to reach critical mass when Angel Flight pilots began to voice their displeasure over the severe pavement issues and in some instances even refused to return to the airport.

We are in a remote location with an aging population,” said Absher. “We need the Angel Flights to carry patients and their families to metropolitan areas for medical treatment.”

In stepped Judge Eyler, who began his tenure in 2011.

“When I was campaigning for office, I asked the community ‘what would you like to see improved?’” explained Judge Eyler. “And many answered that they wanted something done with the airport. It really got us thinking about how important this airport truly is to the county’s residents.”

Working together and with support from TxDOT and the commissioner’s court, Judge Eyler and Absher set out to begin what seemed impossible for those familiar with the condition of the airport: rebuild the airport from the ashes.

In 2011, the team applied for a TxDOT grant and received funding to make the following improvements:

- Reconstruct runway 10-28 (4100 X 75)
- Demolish and reconstruct the taxiway
- Remove the existing LIRL system and replace with new MIRL system
- Remove and replace the beacon and tower
- Construct a new electrical vault
- Install PAPI-2s
- Remove and replace the windcone
- Improve the existing segmented circle

Additionally, the county also improved the existing terminal building by adding central heat and air.

Future plans for the airport include remodeling the terminal building to include a pilot’s lounge, installing an AWOS, extending the runway, building hangars, adding a fuel station and replacing the existing fence with a security/game fence.

Absher, who serves a dual role as the county’s Veterans Services Officer, admits he knew little about aviation before taking on the large task of renovating the airport.

“If you asked me 10 years ago what an AWOS or PAPI meant, I would have looked at you with a blank stare,” laughed Absher. “But I certainly got a crash course and learned in a hurry!”

The ambitious team is proud of their greatly improved airport and what was once a community eyesore at the edge of town now holds an important place for Upton County residents.

“The projects have certainly increased the safety and usefulness of the airport,” said Judge Eyler. “We are excited about being able to safely bring Angel Flights back into the airport to help the community get the healthcare access they may someday need.”

The new precision approach path indicators (PAPI) installed at the Upton County Airport.
FAA SMALL UNMANNED AIRCRAFT REGISTRATION BEGAN DEC. 21

The Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) Small Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) registry went live during the day on Dec. 21, 2015. Please check the agency’s home page at www.faa.gov for updates.

In preparation for registering online, each owner must provide his or her name, home address and e-mail address. Upon completion of registration, the web application will generate a Certificate of Aircraft Registration/Proof of Ownership that will include a unique identification number for the UAS owner, which must be marked on the aircraft.

Owners using the model aircraft for hobby or recreation will only have to register once and may use the same identification number for all of their model UAS. The registration is valid for three years.

Registration is free for the first 30 days, then $5 after that.

By statute, all aircraft weighing more than 0.55 pounds (250 grams) and less than 55 pounds (approximately 25 kilograms), including payloads such as onboard cameras, must be registered.

Under this rule, owners who previously operated an unmanned aircraft exclusively as a model aircraft prior to Dec. 21, 2015, must register no later than Feb. 19, 2016. Owners of any other UAS purchased for use as a model aircraft after Dec. 21, 2015 must register before the first flight outdoors. Owners may use either the paper-based process or the new streamlined, web-based system. Owners using the new streamlined web-based system must be at least 13 years old to register.

The FAA has partnered with several industry associations to educate the public about using unmanned aircraft safely and responsibly.

Remember these rules when you fly:
• Fly below 400 feet altitude.
• Keep your unmanned aircraft in sight at all times.
• Never fly near manned aircraft, especially near airports.
• Never fly over groups of people, stadiums or sporting events.
• Never fly near emergency response efforts.

Working together, we can keep the skies safe for everyone.

Go Big, or Go Home! Victoria Regional Airport’s creative float at the city’s annual Christmas Parade won the “Most Original” award. The float was designed and constructed by airport employees.
Mark your calendar and make plans to attend!
Make plans to attend the 34th Annual Texas Aviation Conference. To be held on March 9-11, 2016, at La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa in Montgomery, Texas.

Be sure to check our website at www.txdot.gov for up-to-date events and when registration will begin.