

## Community Stewardship - Aviation in Action

### Airports Support Community Events and the Local Economy

Colorado airports are more than transportation centers. They support many different activities in the community and often serve as a contributing asset to the local economy. While airports are generally sponsored and supported by cities and/or counties, support is also provided by organizations such as the Colorado Flights Alliance that focuses on serving tourism on the Western Slope. Another unique tourism-related event that was supported by air service was the Bud Light “Whatever USA” event that utilized Gunnison-Crested Butte Regional Airport (GUC). Airports also contribute to community stewardship through activities such as Denver International Airport’s community spaces and art and cultural programs. These examples are highlighted to demonstrate the unique nature of airports’ contributions beyond traditional air transportation service.

### Colorado Flights Alliance – Building the Economy and Air Service on the Western Slope

The Colorado Flights Alliance formed in 2004 to increase air service in the Telluride/Montrose area and to provide marketing support to attract different groups of winter and summer tourists. A mix of local public and private groups fund the organization. The towns of Telluride, Mountain Village, Ouray, and Montrose support the Alliance through lodging and restaurant taxes. Telluride Ski Resort, retailers, real estate firms, private businesses and individuals provide direct funding. About 15 to 30 percent of the Alliance budget goes for marketing; the rest is used for airline guarantees.

The Alliance has served as a successful air service catalyst, providing over two million air seats. Partnering with United, Delta, American, and Allegiant airlines, the Alliance has negotiated non-stop service to Montrose Regional Airport (MTJ) and Telluride Regional Airport (TEX), including 12 major airline hubs during the winter, five major hubs in the summer, and growing year-round options. They also have a minimum revenue guarantee (MRG) program that can support new air service.

The Alliance has developed a formalized approach to retention and development of new air service prospects. Each season (summer and winter), the Alliance polls its stakeholders and sets air service targets for one, three, and five years out. The Alliance then takes the lead with the airlines to coordinate appropriate levels of service for each destination. The airlines publish their schedules 11 months in advance, so the Alliance knows what is added or changed and can react accordingly. The Alliance also monitors weekly data on bookings and will ramp up marketing to fill the gaps if certain days/weeks have low activity. Thanksgiving to New Years is a peak time for winter travel, followed by a quieter period from the beginning of January to President’s Day before travel increases again until the end of March. The Alliance uses several years’ worth of data to develop service objectives and advertise accordingly, including targeting Australia and other international markets during their summer season.

In addition to successful additions to air service, the Alliance, through its marketing efforts and community support, has transitioned four scheduled routes out of MRG programs but expects to continue using the MRGs to retain and expand air service to the area.



*Photo courtesy of Denver Air Connection*



*Photo courtesy of Shahn Sederberg, CDOT Aeronautics*

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### Community Building at Denver International Airport

Denver International Airport (DEN) is one of the largest (53 square miles) and busiest airports in the world serving over 69 million passengers in 2019. Approximately 35,000 people work at the airport, making it the size of a small city. Airport management recognizes the importance not only of passenger and employee experience, but also the integration of the airport into the surrounding community.

DEN's stewardship finds many forms. The airport offers a variety of local and healthy dining options, water bottle refilling stations, quiet places for religious worship, an open-air plaza available for community concerts, beer festivals, and seasonal ice skating. There are art exhibits throughout the facility, and a team of therapy dogs that travel the concourses to help reduce passenger stress. DEN's permanent and visiting art and culture exhibits make it easy for passengers to experience an abundance of public art. On the airport property are 30 site-specific works that include sculptures, murals and other installations. "Travelers can find the pieces displayed in outdoor landscapes, inside Jeppesen Terminal, on airport concourses and in train tunnels. In addition to its permanent collection, DEN continuously works to curate temporary exhibitions, collaborating with museums, cultural institutions and arts organizations to present the highest quality two- and three-dimensional work."<sup>1</sup>

### Bud Light "Whatever, USA" Event – Crested Butte/Gunnison–Crested Butte Regional Airport (GUC)

From September 5th through 7th, 2014, the ski resort town of Crested Butte was literally painted blue as Anheuser-Busch hosted the Bud Light "Whatever, USA" event on the town's main street. The event was the focus of the company's "Up for Whatever" marketing campaign and brought 1,000 contest winners to Crested Butte. The visitors and locals alike participated in a variety of activities throughout the weekend including a parade, free concerts, a main street picnic and a beach party. By the end of the event, the city had received a \$500,000 donation from Anheuser-Busch and the local economy received an estimated \$2 million boost during a normally quiet season.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the 1,000 fans that attended the event arrived via charter aircraft from around the country. GUC, located 23 miles south of Crested Butte, served as the destination for these flights as its 9,400-foot-long runway is capable of handling large jet aircraft. On the first day of the event GUC processed more than 1,700 passengers in a four-hour timespan - significantly more than the usual activity at the airport. Bud Light chartered specially-painted Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft as well as a National Airlines Boeing 757 and an Atlas Air Boeing 767 to bring in attendees. Anheuser-Busch cited the airport as one of the reasons why Crested Butte was chosen to host the event, as GUC provided the capabilities of a large airport without a long drive need to reach the rural town. Since the event, GUC has experienced an increase in large jet aircraft visiting during ski season. The airport played a pivotal role in the success of the "Whatever, USA" event and continues to support the local community's economy.



Photo courtesy of Denver International Airport



Photo courtesy of Rick Lamport, Gunnison-Crested Butte Regional Airport

### Summary

Airports are typically viewed as gateways to the national and international transportation systems, but they perform many more services for the community, paving the way for access to recreational resources, additional local economic development, facilitation of special events, and an enhanced community experience.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.flydenver.com/art>

<sup>2</sup> USA Today. (September 2014) "Bud Light turns tiny ski town into 'Whatever, USA'." Available online at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/09/05/bud-light-turns-tiny-ski-town-into-whatever-usa/15172279/> (Accessed March 2020)