NS Aviation wins contract with United

Maintenance work could add at least 40 jobs at Smith Reynolds

BY RICHARD CRAVER
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The landing of a multiyear maintenance contract with United Airlines is giving new air to NS Aviation LLC's ambitious growth plans.

NS Aviation said Thursday that it expects to add at least 40 full-time employees by year's end to work on the United business, bolstering its workforce at Smith Reynolds Airport to about 150.

NS Aviation does business as North State Aviation. It operates on a monthly lease for 80,000 square feet, including 50,000 in hangar space, at 4001 N. Liberty St.

The company is already providing two lines of maintenance and retrofit work on United's Boeing 737-900 fleet, with each line having about 45 to 50 dedicated employees. The new contract could eventually double the number of lines NS Aviation dedicates to United maintenance and retrofitting work.

The company said it will need additional hangar and mechanic shop space to handle the expanded contract, offering a revenue boost to the airport.

NS Aviation had 31 employees when it announced in January 2011, with Gov. Bev Perdue's assistance, that it would have 300 employees within four years as part of the expansion.

The company pledged the jobs will pay an average wage of $42,072 — $80 more than the average in Forsyth County. It would spend nearly $1.3 million on capital investments.

In return, the state made the company eligible for a $500,000 grant from the One North Carolina Fund. It will also benefit from a $500,000 grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation to the Airport Commission of Forsyth County for airport infrastructure improvements.

When NS Aviation made its expansion announcement, management acknowledged that gaining confidence in their business operations and finances will be crucial to attracting customers, employees and community support.

Since then, NS Aviation has kept a low profile while picking up business from about a dozen companies that include Miami Air and Arik Air.

"Our growth has been sparked by the significant increase we've experienced in our customer base," said Charlie Creech, president of North State Aviation.

He said the United contract "now ensures our facility will have a high volume of work for the upcoming years."

Tom Chappell, NS Aviation's vice president of business development, said the United contract is the result of "several months of cultivating relationships."

"We feel that our efforts have yielded the potential for ongoing success for us and many others in the aviation community."

Mark Davidson, director of Smith Reynolds Airport, said he is "elated" that NS Aviation was able to land a major contract. He said the airport commission is negotiating with NS Aviation for a longer-term lease in part because of the United contract.

"They had developed a niche providing maintenance on large aircraft for charter airlines to stay operational," he said.

"With this contract, they will have a regular stream of business and revenue."

Gayle Anderson, chief executive and president of the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, said she recognized it would take time for NS Aviation to expand once it laid the groundwork for its operations.

"It's good news for the community that its work is paying off," Anderson said.

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