**Healthy Airport Is Panel's Goal**

By Cyril Zaniski

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New Medicine

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If public attention will help keep understood Smith Reynolds Airport healthy, as some airport officials believe, Kenneth D. Cox may be able to supply the medicine. 

Cox, the president of the airport's Air Service Improvements Task Force, finally got attention for his new group last month by stirring up a little trouble.

He directed a few timely blasts at the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce. He accused the chamber of undermining airport efforts to get jet carrier service by telling other groups that the chamber's interest in having Forsyth County represented on the Regional Airport Authority. The chamber is to form a committee this year to study the matter, and Cox hopes they keep Smith Reynolds' interests in mind - or else.

"If they raise the ideas again and say we want representation in Greensboro, I'm going to throw rocks at them," he said. "The Chamber of Commerce is supposed to represent small-business interests of Forsyth County, and if they don't, shame on them."

Cox is a straight-talking kind of fellow. He's not a genteel kind of guy, but he's not necessarily comfortable there, but the airport needed a little help, he has old friends at Piedmont Airlines who removed commercial service in 1983.

Cox has chosen to become the most visible member of a small group that has no real power and only hopes that it can win public support for the airport. About 10 people, most of whom have specific interests in flying, have attended recent meetings.

The ultimate goal is to lure and accommodate commercial air service from Winston-Salem, and a refurbished passenger terminal at Smith Reynolds is more than a Smith Reynolds, Piedmont Airways, a commuter airline, offers only the passenger service. Five flights a day at a total of about 400 or 700 passengers a month to Charlotte.

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Cox, a licensed pilot for 19 years, approaches his volunteer role with the same tenacity that he expresses when flying. He talks about flight with childlike wonderment.

"I am just making it easier for the people to get to the airport, and I think people are interested and just looking at it all. Cox just sees other people sharing that enthusiasm - naturally.

He promotes the airport like a carnival hawk. Last month, when the airport commission discussed possible improvements to the airport, Cox chimed in. He proposed that Sunday airplane rides be offered for the general public as entertainment for people at the restaurant.

The idea is activity. The more planes that take off and land at the airport, the more useable is the land, the more people know about it and the more it becomes their own.

So Cox suggested a way that is being investigated: starting a charter service to Winston-Salem for flying excursions from Northwest North Carolina and Virginia, to New York. the National Guard, which is now in Winston-Salem, to include here; adding more general aviation flights; recruiting a private aircraft dealership and persuading Sunbird, which has shown interest in aggressive promotions here, to offer direct flights from Winston-Salem to nearby regions.

Ultimately, Cox hopes that a busy Smith Reynolds will stay alive in Fort Worth, Texas, stay alive.

Last month, commercial air service returned to Fort Worth, after for the first time in 30 years. The new Fort Worth Airline began service to Texas cities from Winston-Salem, which had commercial air service but had stayed healthy by having salespeople of private jets and general aviation.

At Smith Reynolds, air service - through the alpine airport is the problem of Cox - is really a hobby to the chief executive of Carolina Heating and Air Conditioning.

Somehow, Cox manages to find a way to stay close to the airplane. When he was the manager at the Gilgit and Thaloo Coal Co. in Winston-Salem, now the FSG Coal and Oil Co. he was the manager of the company's own pilots - first, because the company had service contracts all over the Southeast, and second, because Cox believes that knowing how to fly makes it easier, not better.

Flying teaches a person to be more methodical, he said, and more likely to do things in trying situations.

"If you're on a 2,000-foot ladder and you drop your pipe wrench, you have to improvise, just the way you would have to improvise if something goes wrong with your airplane and you have to land in some nook and cranny here," he said.

Cox, 38, was born in Fort Wayne, Ind., and moved to Winston-Salem as a child. He attended Randolph Community College; he intended to become a military chaplain but found that business appealed to him a lot more.

At Wingate, he met his first wife, Linda Gilley, whose father, James Gilley, was an owner of the coal company that Cox managed for 15 years. When it was sold, he took some trucks and equipment and started Carolina Heating and Air Conditioning.

Cox spends a good part of his days doing paperwork, taking a desk job with an apartment building, answering the phone that rings about every 10 minutes with customers asking for service or advice for their heating systems.

He and his second wife, Judy Hindley, Cox, own and manage the heating and air-conditioning company. The company, which has six employees, does most of its work for Forsyth Parsons and other major contractors. The company has been busy at Northpoint offices and at Fort Air Park, Dusty.

Working at Airpark East, an industrial park being built near the Piedmont Airlines, offered some help in Cox's effort to help the board of the Guilford County Airport. It was in December, not long after Cox took charge of the task force, that Charles Webb, the chamber's executive vice president, told a reporter that it was "a question of whether to drive to Greensboro for a flight or not to drive" to Charlotte from Winston-Salem for a connection. A week later, Peoples Express, which had been negotiating with Smith Reynolds, announced that it would go to Regional Airport, and Cox and William Rankin II, the manager of Smith Reynolds, blamed Webb and the chamber.

There had been friction between the airport and the chamber since September, when the chamber scheduled Stanley Frank, the chairman of the Regional Airport Authority, to speak at its retreat and seemed to Smith Reynolds officials to have invited a Winston-Salem representative as an afterthought. Frank's topic: Forsyth County representation on the authority.

Cox believes basically that representation on the Regional Airport Authority would benefit Forsyth County residents of having a choice between two airports and could leave the Triad with a second airport that he believes will be necessary if the area grows as some expect it will.

This is why a Forsyth representative would be outvoted by those from cities like Greensboro. Members of the Smith Reynolds commission say that the authority could not sell the Triad's airport, which is now owned by the State of North Carolina.

Cox's name has come up frequently in negotiations, and Cox and his commissioners are in the dark about what happens at the airport's development. As for the federal aid officials have said that the money could be replaced from other sources. (Over the past two years, Rankin said, Smith Reynolds has received almost $600,000 in federal money to pay for improvements for the terminal.)

"It's more to do with a lot of people who are afraid of losing their jobs," Cox said. "At least, if they change the airport and the city's representation, we can get up and say that we want to continue doing what we're doing, and if not, then we want to do something else. We're not going to say, 'You're not doing anything.'"