level of service at our airport, and they have done so. The whole idea is that we don’t want to lose American to the point where they own the place.”

Brantley said he believes Piedmont Triad should actively recruit carriers who can compete head-to-head with Piedmont Airlines, which despite its hub in Charlotte is still the major carrier out of Greensboro. “Today,” Brantley said, “you’re not going to find one carrier who would have the resources to do that. You’re going to have to find a series of carriers. You’ve got America up there [in Greensboro], and American has a lot of service capability that is not coming here, that does not need to come here. Piedmont Triad at least has that alternative. They need to develop avenues whereby no one carrier is going to be able to say, ‘I’ve got this market 100 percent, and you’re going to do what I want to do or you’re not going to do anything.’”

Brantley suggested that Piedmont Triad attempt to lure both Northwest Airlines and Southwest Airlines to the Greensboro facility. Both, he said, need East Coast hubs. “I’d like to say to Stanley Frank that I understand why you guys went after Peoples Express but learn from that that there are a lot of folks out there who seem like a good thing at the time. But never lose sight of the fact that when you’ve got quality at an airport, you’ve got to compete with quality and more quality. You’ve got real good quality at Greensboro with Piedmont. Don’t go putting up some second-string competitor against Piedmont because Piedmont will beat them to death. Put a first-rate competitor up against Piedmont and they’ll compete.”

Floyd P. McKenzie Jr., chief operating officer at Piedmont Triad International, said officials there have spoken with both Northwest and Southwest airlines about servicing the Greensboro airport. In fact, he said, a meeting was held with Southwest Airlines just two weeks ago. Nothing, however, has been decided, he said.

“We’re always looking for a good airline but the possibility of our securing a major hub are probably rather slim at this point by virtue of the fact that most of the major airlines have established those hubs they’re going to be operating from,” Frank said of his conversations with the airlines. “But certainly we would be receptive under certain circumstances to any airline that might want to service this airport for any type of hub, a mini-hub or a major hub.”

because we didn’t want to start building additions four or five years after it was opened and, in fact, we’re not going to have to build on to this facility for some time.”

That’s not to say Frank doesn’t expect the airport to grow. Only that there was room several years ago when Peoples Express decided to start service to Greensboro, and there was room later when Presidential Airlines moved in. Unfortunately for Piedmont Triad, neither operation was a success and both are now gone.

John C. Brantley, director of Raleigh-Durham International, believes, too, that there is a good deal of growth potential available for Piedmont Triad, but he says the Greensboro airport will always live in the shadow of his airport and the one at Charlotte. Several weeks ago, Brantley spoke to a Triad civic group interested in transportation issues. He related that speech in a recent interview. “I told them that, OK, you’re sitting up here today taking stock of where you are, where you’ve been and where you want to go and that the bottom line is that you can’t have everything you would like to have. The time to have gotten that is passed, but I told them they do have a good future and that what they need to do is to develop and maintain a competitive environment. You don’t want to get dominated by one airline.

“You can say that RDU is dominated by American,” Brantley said. “In growth numbers it appears to be, but RDU has had a very competitive environment for a long time and pricewise we still do. We have actually worked with Piedmont [Airlines] to give them additional space to encourage them to maintain a high
Planning to help overcome past losses

Airports look ahead

by Dennis Whittington

The Triangle only has one. So does Charlotte, Asheville, Wilmington and most other areas of North Carolina.

Only the Triad has two commercial, passenger-service airports. Cooperation, however, is not the byword of the day when it comes to air travel in the Triad.

The two airports, Piedmont Triad International and Smith Reynolds, in no way work in conjunction with one another—and their operators make little pretense of even liking one another. Neither are hubs for any major carrier. Both feel they have suffered for these lost hubs and, as a result, both are currently involved in expensive upgrades of their long-term master plans.

Smith Reynolds Airport in Winston-Salem spent nearly $45,000 for its new master plan, just recently delivered to the Airport Commission of Forsyth County. It recommends, among other things, that the airport commission buy 45 nearby houses and one church to expand its otherwise landlocked facility.

Experts have only recently begun what is expected to be a two-year, $250,000 update of a master plan for Piedmont Triad International.

Master plans need to be kept current by any airport that wants to receive funding from the federal government’s $6 billion aviation trust fund for construction projects. The in-depth look at facilities and needs also should help

More on page 3
hub in Charlotte. CCAir, which used to be known as Sunbird Airlines until its association with Piedmont Airlines, set a new record for itself in May when it boarded 70,310 passengers, a 28 percent increase over May 1987. The company boarded 1,662 of those passengers at Smith Reynolds, a big jump from the days when a struggling Sunbird would board 100 people a month at the Winston-Salem airport.

From 1938 until 1978, the since disbanded Civil Aeronautics Board attempted to ensure that every corner of the nation had adequate air service. It dictated airline destinations, the schedules they would fly and the fares they would charge. But then came deregulation and airlines were free to set routes, fares and schedules on the basis of their own market and profit projections rather than according to government regulations. That meant some of those corners where service had been dictated, but where it was not always profitable, were dropped from schedules.

In the pursuit of expanding markets and profits, airlines flocked to the largest regional population centers — places like Atlanta, Chicago and Denver — with airports built to accommodate millions of passengers. The shift from point-to-point flying to the cost-effective "hub-and-spoke" configuration called for smaller communities to be connected to hubs by a network of radiating spokes.

Hub-to-hub traffic, such as Charlotte-to-Atlanta, is fast and frequent, but spoke cities, like Greensboro, are sometimes less accessible. Spoke travelers usually have to fly first to a hub — sometimes in the opposite direction from their desired destination — before taking off again. For example, some of Piedmont’s flights from Greensboro to Richmond, Va., must first go to Charlotte where an hour-long layover is not uncommon.

Commuter airlines, such as CCAir at Smith Reynolds, generally fly propeller-powered planes built for short-haul travel and seat less than 60 passengers. Increasingly, these planes have replaced the large jets that had served some spoke communities.

Both Piedmont Triad International, which until earlier this year had been an "Airport Operators Council, a Washington, D.C.-based association, recently ranked the airports based on passenger volume. Piedmont Triad International was No. 71, pretty far behind both Charlotte Douglas (No. 24) and Raleigh-Durham (No. 44). Stanley Frank, chief executive of the Greensboro-High Point Authority, which oversees Piedmont Triad International, says the counting procedures used by the airport authority's name for the state's May 29 board meeting was passed to the state, but that change must be enforced by the N.C. General Assembly.

Charlotte and Raleigh are losing many more originating passengers that we are," Frank said. "Higher figures you read are misleading as a result of a decline in the number of people who don't go there. People don't spend a lot in the community. They may stop for a meal or eat breakfast but don't spend any money on merchants."

In addition, Piedmont Triad airports offer travelers direct flights to London via Piedmont and Paris via American. Despite its name, Piedmont Triad International Airport's marketing is not based on direct flights to

Photo by Julie Knight

STORY
There are certain perceptions that the market has about this airport that the facts and figures just don’t bear out,” according to Mike Horn, a partner in the advertising and marketing firm. “For example, there is a market perception by some people that it costs more to fly out of this airport compared to North Carolina’s two major airports. That’s not true. So part of our marketing effort will be to put those facts and figures in front of our market so they can see them.

“Another perception we’ve found is the old ‘you can’t get there from here’ thing,” Horn said. “But the fact is that any place you want to go, you can get there from Piedmont Triad International Airport. A lot of it is going to be an educational process.

“A third element of the campaign,” Horn continued, “will be to tell people that Piedmont Triad International Airport provides a modern facility, excellent service, great convenience, and does not cost the taxpayer one penny. It is a self-sufficient entity, responsible for its own revenues.”

As for those who would say 70 departures daily are not enough, Horn says it is the airlines, not the airport, who are responsible in this age of deregulation for setting schedules — as well as fares. “The airport authority is responsible for the overall growth of the airport and its facilities. We don’t set the schedules or the fares. We want to develop those distinctions in this marketing campaign.”

Smith Reynolds is involved in a campaign by CAir to convince travelers that it is easier to fly from Winston-Salem than it is to drive to Greensboro.

A recent postcard mailed to Piedmont’s frequent flyers pointed out that parking at Smith Reynolds is free and that the commuter offers seven non-stop each weekday between Winston-Salem and Charlotte, and each of those flights qualifies for mileage credit in Piedmont’s frequent flyer bonus program.

Smith Reynolds took an early lead in North Carolina aviation during the 1940s, but officials today contend that Winston-Salem failed to adequately support the airport and sat by idly as industrialist Cesar Cone and other wealthy Guilford County businessmen invested their own money and convinced the government to invest some of its funds into turning what used to be a grassy Lindley Field into a state-of-the-art airport.

Today, it appears that Lindley Field’s successor, Piedmont Triad International Airport, is scrambling to ensure that it does not fall to the same fate as Smith Reynolds.

A recent affadavit sworn to a judge states that Smith Reynolds was awarded the contract for a new terminal building. The new terminal, which will be built beyond any immediate needs, will cost $10 million and is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

As can be expected of competitors in any business, there is little love lost between the two operations. “Piedmont Triad is not an airport,” Roger E. Morgan, manager of Smith Reynolds, says matter-of-factly. “It’s a cow pasture over in Greensboro that’s got a lot of political backing.”

Morgan, who came to Winston-Salem in 1958 as an air traffic controller and who became manager of the airport in 1966 when he retired from the Federal Aviation Administration, doesn’t deny that he carries some personal bitterness about the way Piedmont Triad has surpassed Smith Reynolds in terms of growth and prestige. “They bought our mayor, our chamber of commerce, our newspaper and even our TV station. Now Piedmont Triad gets all the attention, and they’d have people believe this airport’s not worth fooling with.”