

Phoenix Air gains approval for \$1.5M expansion

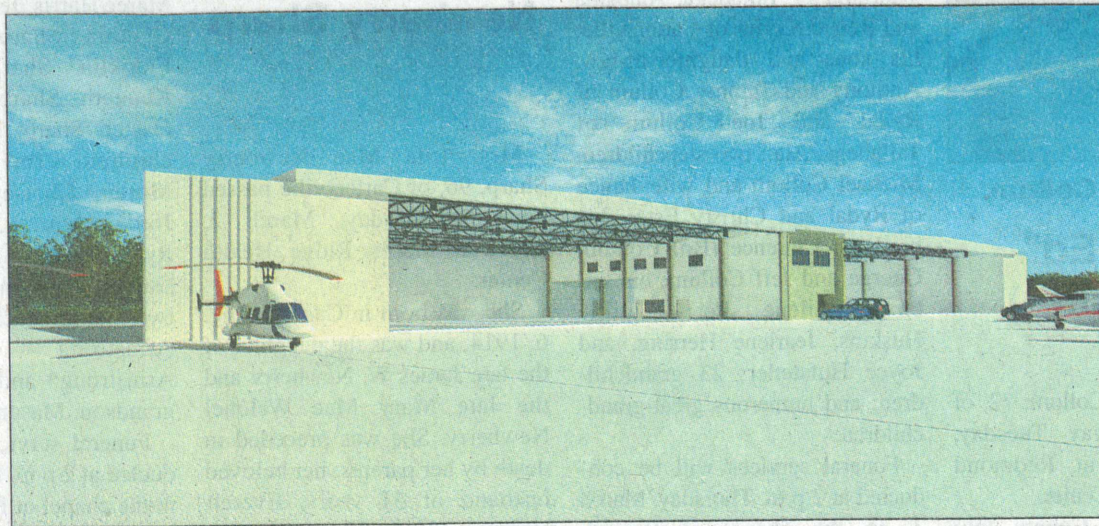
BY MATT SHINALL

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A new structure will soon be erected at the Cartersville-Bartow County Airport, the largest area under one roof to grace the campus will also be the first to land on the east side of the runway. Housing a new operation for Phoenix Air, groundbreaking is expected to occur later this month on the approximately 40,800-square-foot hangar.

With approval of the Cartersville-Bartow County Airport Authority, Phoenix Air entered a lease agreement Tuesday for the property. The hangar will enable Phoenix Air to enter a new field of service, expanding beyond air transportation into aircraft maintenance and modification.

"Phoenix Air has been at the Cartersville Airport since 1984, and over the years we've grown and grown. Our principle business focus has been providing aircraft to clients where we provide the airplane, the flight crew, the maintenance and any other sup-



A rendering of Phoenix Air's proposed hangar shows the two bays and office complex, which will serve as the company's entrance into aircraft maintenance, repair and modification services.

port personnel," said Dent Thompson, vice president of operations. "We've pretty well saturated our mar-

ket for chartering out aircraft and we were looking for new profit areas that we could go into, and this aircraft maintenance and modification work is an obvious profit area where we can capitalize on the experience and the expertise our people have developed maintaining our own fleet."

At an estimated cost of \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million, the hangar will consist of two bays separated by a two-story office space at the facility's center. The facility's indoor area will be just less than that of a football field stretching a total length of 340 feet with a depth of 120 feet and a height of 37 feet. Within the bays, aircraft will be brought to Phoenix Air for routine maintenance, repairs and custom modifications.

"Over the last 25 years, we've developed a tremendous amount of expertise in maintaining aircraft; in fact, we maintain our own aircraft at the level they would receive at the factory that manufactured them.

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We do what is called factory-level maintenance, and we've had a number of our clients over the years approach us about working on other people's aircraft, outside aircraft, doing routine maintenance right up to modifications to aircraft," Thompson said.

With customers already lined up, construction will be completed by November or December. The expansion will employ 30 to 40 new aviation-related people in its first year with more positions expected to be added in coming years.

Thompson added that the business brought in by this expansion would consist of the "perfect client" in which air traffic and noise levels are not greatly affected due to the nature of the business.

"At the end of the day, what we think we'll have is the perfect client. It's not going to attract more aircraft coming in. It's going to attract airplanes coming in one time, landing, being here anywhere from several weeks to several months, being worked on and then they depart. So it does not increase traffic at the airport but it increases the number of employees who will work at the airport and in turn spend their paycheck in the local community. It's a win-win for the airport authority, the city, the county and Phoenix Air," Thompson said.

In coordination with Phoenix Air's capital investment, the Cartersville-Bartow County Airport Authority approved

Tuesday an incentive policy applying to all new projects. With a minimum investment of \$1.5 million, projects at the airport can now qualify for lease agreement discounts per square foot if certain criteria are met, including minimum employment levels and minimum employee starting salary. Criteria within the incentive policy advance on a graduated scale up to 20 years for qualification in the program.

"We want to make the new lease agreements based on square footage. What we're doing here is offering an incentive program to Phoenix Air because they're making a sizable investment in the community in building this new hangar space. So what this incentive program does is it gives an opportunity to future companies who want to come in here," said Dan Porta, Cartersville assistant city manager.

The authority's approval of the incentive policy came with unanimous support from the board members voting. Board member Hans Lutjens expressed his hope that the program will encourage further investment and economic development at the airport.

"I just think it's a good way to provide incentives for companies like Phoenix. It encourages them to grow and expand at the airport due to capital expenditures that they're putting up to build this hangar and the employees they currently have and the amount of economic impact to our area. I think the incentive program is a good idea," Lutjens said.