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Independence Municipal Airport's extended runway brings more jets

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MATTHEW PUTNEY

Mechanic Abigail Heidenreich affixes the fairing on the airplane during an annual check at the Independence Airport Friday, Jan. 18, 2013, in Independence, Iowa. (MATTHEW PUTNEY / Courier Photo Editor)

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January 31, 2013 4:23 pm • By JEFF REINITZ, jeff.reinitz@wfcourier.com

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INDEPENDENCE, Iowa --- Recent improvements have been paying off for the Independence



Photos: Progress Edition 2013

January 31, 2013 1:35 pm (0)

Municipal Airport.

"We just redid everything at the airport. Essentially everything is new here," said Jonathan Walter of Walter Aviation, which took over as the fixed base operator for the airport in July. Before the switch, Walter had worked for the former FBO.

Beginning in 2006, the airport, which goes by the FAA call letters KIIB, embarked on an expansion project.

It extended its runway from 4,000 feet to 5,500 feet and added a new full-length parallel taxiway.

"Once you're over the 5,000-foot threshold, you can get more jet traffic," Walter said. "A lot of the private jets that fly around typically, if it's less than 5,000 feet, you start restricting who can come in and out of your airport."

He said the added length has meant an increase in jets.

The airport also upgraded its instrument approaches, which help planes to land in bad weather.

The old system used an A.M. radio signal to broadcast the runway's location, and planes' instruments would show an arrow pointing the way through the clouds.

Walter said the outdated A.M. approach wasn't very accurate and has been replaced with a new GPS-based system.

"With the upgrades, we added a GPS approach to each end of the runway, so no matter which way you come in to land, you have a GPS-guided approach that's very precise and brings the aircraft down to about 300 feet of the ground," Walter said.

"That's very critical for the jet traffic because they are going pretty fast, and the people they are bringing in want to do business today, not tomorrow when the weather is better," he said.

Other projects have included a new terminal building with public lobby, phone for pilots and a weather information system to plan for flights.

Walter's company sells aviation fuel and offers other services for pilots and hosts flying lessons for aspiring pilots.

These improvements, which were completed in 2009, bumped KIIB up into the enhanced services airport classification, one step under commercial service ports like Waterloo, Cedar Rapids and Dubuque.

The Independence Municipal Airport is the only enhanced stop in Northeast Iowa.

Walter said the status is a bonus for economic development in Buchanan County because businesses often look at airport facilities when they consider setting up in a community.

Daily traffic at the airport can range from one or two operations to up to 60 on a busy day.

He said the flights are split between lessons, local pilots, business visits and medical flights taking patients to other states for treatment.

Tags Independence, Airport, Iowa, Municipal Airport, Walter Aviation, Jonathan Walter, Faa

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