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Longtime airport manger takes job at FAA

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Keokuk Municipal Airport Manager Greg Gobble, center, stands with some of his coworkers at the airport, Mike Ball, flight instructor at left, and Jeff Moyer, aircraft technician. Gobble is leaving the airport to take a job with the FAA.

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Greg Gobble has made a lot of friends and contacts during his time as manager of the Keokuk Municipal Airport and part owner of Lindner Aviation, also housed at the airport north of Keokuk. But now, he is going moving on to the next adventure in life, a job as an aviation inspector with the FAA.

“I’ll still be in the area,” Gobble said as a friend stopped into his office to wish him well.

Today is Gobble's last day at the Keokuk airport. He said he came to Keokuk in 1991. When one of the owners of Lindner Aviation, Bill Engle, passed away in 2000, Gobble and his wife, Janice, and some partners bought into the company.

"That was June 2000, so exactly 20 years," he said.

Irwin Lindner, Gobble said, always retained a share and was a tie breaker in the company. He passed away in 2013. His daughter got his shares of the company then, so Gobble said it's nice to have a Lindner still involved.

"He really was my mentor," Gobble said.

Gobble got into aviation through the United States Marine Corps. He said he tried to pick an aircraft that was too big to be on a ship, but the Corps had different plans for him. He worked on CH46 helicopters.

"I spent 13 months at sea," he said. "The CH46 fits perfectly on the ships."

After four years in the Marines, Gobble, originally from Fort Madison, went to Indian Hills Community College and then was at the Ottumwa and Burlington airports before landing in Keokuk.

"It's been a good run," he said. "We've gotten a lot done here in Keokuk."

As a member of the board of the Iowa Public Airport Association currently, he has also been president and vice president in the past, he said he's gotten to do many lobbying trips to Washington, D.C. as well as Des Moines when seeking funding for different projects.

One of Gobble's stories from a lobbying trip was meeting with Tom Harkin staffer Richard Bender. Gobble said the airport was in need of a wildlife fence. The airport first had to have a wildlife study done, which took about a year. When that was over, Gobble's group was sharing the results of that survey and the report said there were 52 individual deer around the airport.

"I said, 'Unfortunately I don't know all their names,' and he laughed," Gobble said. "Through a lunch later, I learned that no one had ever seen Richard laugh."

Making connections like that is vital to the continued growth of the airport. Gobble said there's been a lot of improvements over the years, including a recent instrument landing system. The airport, with its FAA certified repair facility, also has seen improvements to lighting systems, the buildings at the facility as well as increase weight ratings for its runways.

"We can handle some pretty big aircraft," Gobble said.

Gobble has gotten to do a lot of interesting and fun things during his time at the airport. He introduced a group of Marines in helicopters to Casey's taco pizza. He was there earlier this year when the governor of Missouri landed in Keokuk to go to an event in Fort Madison, as well as when President Barack Obama landed at the Keokuk Airport to visit the Siemens factory in 2010.

He had a list of names of people who have been influential and a great group to work with. He said Donna Farrell was the office manager for about 12 years and was a really organized person that did a lot to keep the operation running smoothly. It was always a joke around the airport that she was his "work wife." Now his actual wife is doing that job.

While he said he will be around from time to time, not being around his friends every day will be different for him.

"I'll do a fair amount of traveling in the new job," he said.

The city is continuing to look for a new airport manager, but so far, has not had much luck in finding one. There will be an interim manger while the search continues.

Joe B