

SIOUX CITY — City officials and business leaders donned orange hard hats and dug gold-painted shovels into the dirt Tuesday to ceremoniously break ground on a \$10.7 million aviation center at Sioux Gateway Airport.



Siouxland Chamber of Commerce President Chris McGowan shakes hands with Morningside University President Albert Mosley at a groundbreaking ceremony for a new aviation center at Sioux Gateway Airport. The aviation center includes a flight academy established in partnership with Morningside, WITCC and Oracle Aviation.

The 40,000-square-foot facility includes a flight academy and additional aviation operations. The aviation center was established through partnerships with Morningside University, Western Iowa Tech Community College and Oracle Aviation. The project, which was spearheaded by city officials and leaders at The Siouxland Initiative, includes hangar space, training classrooms and office facilities.

"We are so incredibly excited to be kicking off this project and bring a new focus on aviation training and great customer service to the field," said Dave Poole, vice president of business development for Oracle Aviation, an Omaha aviation company. "We are excited to work toward becoming an incredible resource and advocate for aviation both here throughout Siouxland and throughout the entire tri-state community."

Morningside University is creating professional flight and aviation management programs, which are set to welcome students in the fall of 2023, while WITCC plans to offer an associates of applied science in aviation maintenance.

Oracle Aviation's projections show the number of passenger flights doubling in the next 20 years and nearly 80% of active pilots being forced into retirement in the next 14 years due to pilot age requirements. Boeing estimates that more than 850,000 pilots will need to be trained to keep up with demand.

"Nationally, the need for pilots and aviation management professionals is at a historic high. That is also true here in Siouxland," Morningside President Albert Mosley said. "As a regional resource, this partnership allows us to provide the skilled talent that the aviation and other industries in this area need; and it gives Morningside students another pathway toward a fulfilling, high-wage career."

WITCC President Terry Murrell said the shortage of maintenance engineers is "even more pressing than the pilot shortage."

"Western Iowa Tech is very proud to be a part of this opportunity, really because it allows us to go in a new venture and to respond to the community's needs," he said.

Mayor Bob Scott said the Airport Board of Trustees is "very supportive" of the project because of the impact it is going to have on the community. He noted that the city looked at a flight school back in the 90s, but such a project just wasn't possible at that time. He said the aviation center wouldn't be moving forward without a \$1 million grant from the Economic Development Administration.

"This gives us a lot of opportunities in our community -- a lot of landings and takeoffs. The school will have a direct impact on our tower situation, which will be very, very helpful. It'll give some part-time jobs for our 185th airmen and airwomen," he said. "... But the most important thing for me is that it will give a lot of opportunity for our young people to get into a profession that we didn't otherwise have in this community."

Col. Brian Miller, former commander of the 185th Refueling Wing, is serving as director of aviation for Morningside and overseeing the development of facilities, curriculum and recruitment.

"This is a perfect partnership in an outstanding location. The Sioux Gateway Airport offers an ideal setting for pilots to learn in a four-season setting, and the connections that SUX has to commercial, private and government aviation entities offers students a variety of opportunity," Miller said in a statement provided by the university.