

# **Skipper: Sims inherits well-run organization in Mason City airport**

David Sims takes over this week as manager of the Mason City Municipal Airport.

It's fair to say he worked his way from the ground up to his new position – because he started as an airport maintenance man 12 years ago.

He is fortunate because he is taking the helm of one of the most efficient, well-run organizations within the city government. The five-member Airport Commission is an independent body in that it makes its own decisions – but it gets its funding from the city government and state and federal grants. Commission members are appointed, not elected. In other words, they are volunteers.

The commission does not get much public attention, particularly when you consider how important its work is, because it just seems to quietly take care of business.

Sims is taking over for Pam Osgood, who has worked at the airport for 29 years, beginning as a secretary in 1990, moving up to administrative assistant

in 1998, serving two tenures as interim manager before being named full-time manager in 2005.

She weathered many storms over the years that many of us are probably not even aware of, such as constantly dealing with the possibility of losing airline service altogether as one airline after another pulled up stakes in Mason City.

Also, there has been the continual threat of Congress to eliminate the Essential Air Service subsidies that allow airlines to serve small communities such as Mason City. Pam developed such a good relationship with the Iowa congressional delegation that she always had their ear.

And, of course, there was all the upheaval following Sept. 11.

She has had a great relationship with the media because she recognized the importance of trying to keep the public informed even when the news wasn't always good.

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The Airport Commission has been led by only two chairpersons over the past 40 years. How's that for stability. Joni Dunn was on the commission for 36 years and was chairman most of that time. So she fought the same battles that Osgood did and was never afraid to speak her mind.

Several years ago, there was a movement on to make the airport a regional airport. Regionalism is thought by many to be a big money-saver because it consolidates many entities into one. The thinking regarding the airport was to make it a regional one and to form a regional board that would include representatives from many North Iowa communities. Each would contribute financially to the airport operations proportionate to their populations.

Dunn railed against it, pointing out that Mason City would have nothing to gain and would lose control of operations at its own airport even though it would still be making the biggest financial contribution. She won that battle and we are all better for it.

The chairman for the past several years has been Tom Hovland, a successful businessman and pilot who owns a plane and has a hangar at the airport. So he brings to the table his sound business sense plus the experience of someone who has some skin in the game at the airport. Retired Army Gen. Gary Wattnem has been another stabilizing force, having served on the commission for 21 years.

Sims, the new manager, came to Mason City from Mississippi in 2007. He arrived here in January in sub-zero weather. He said in his hometown of Carriere, Mississippi, they were having a “cold spell” when the temperature hit 40 degrees.

“This is about as cold as I’ve ever been,” he said in a Globe Gazette interview at the time. He said prior to coming to Mason City, he had never seen a snowplow. Now he was operating one.

He didn’t know it then but it was all a warm-up for his new position.