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# Century of Flight – Part VI

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*NOTE: This is the sixth of 10 Ramblin' columns I'm writing from July 5 to Sept. 6 about the first 100 years of flight in Iowa.*

Look, up in the sky, it's a bird, it's a plane, it's \$18,400,000,000.

With apologies to Superman, aviation in Iowa has become a super big business in the 100 years since an Iowan first flew a heavier-than-air craft.



"It is significant," says Tim McClung of the Office of Aviation at the Iowa Department of Transportation. "The interesting thing is, all the way from 100 years ago when Art Hartman flew, who would have imagined aviation would've become so integrated into our way of life?"

Exactly.

Like Fulton's Folly when it came to steamboats, earlier aviators were looked upon as foolish men with too much time on their hands. Those toys wouldn't amount to much. Man wasn't meant to fly.

But a 2009 IDOT report pegs the economic impact of aviation in Iowa at \$18.4 billion, which is one reason I'm writing about a century of flight in Iowa for 10 consecutive Mondays, July 5 through Sept. 6.

Would you believe that 12 percent of Iowa's economy is linked to aviation? That's 47,000 jobs.

After World War II, aviation took off. Airports were built or expanded. Cargo, including the mail, was hauled on regular routes. Manufacturing of airplanes and their peripherals grew. People wanted to fly.

"Everyone was drawn to it," Tim says. "It was new and exciting."

In 1941, Iowa had 19 cities with designated airports. By 1948, that was up to 156 airports plus additional "landing areas." Into the 1960s, Iowa had 115 municipal airports and 113 private ones.



Much of this growth came with the federal government's involvement, often in grants matched with local money. In late 1944, the feds announced funding of nearly \$10 million for airport improvements in Iowa. Cedar Rapids received \$343,000 to upgrade from a Class 2 to a Class 4 (the highest level) airport.

In this vein, Iowa had 633 aircraft registered in 1946 — about 4,000 today.

When the Office of Aviation undertook the economic study in 2009, Tim, program and project manager, says officials wanted it to reflect how the entire aviation system affects us all.

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“Even if you don’t use the airports very frequently, they impact all Iowans,” Tim says.

“So many people, when they think of aviation, they think of it in such a narrow spectrum. They think of the commercial side or they think about the guy out at the airport playing with his airplane on the weekends.”

But, consider all of the employees and support staff at airports. (There are 2,695 jobs at The Eastern Iowa Airport with an annual payroll of \$94.7 million.) The security guards and car rental companies. The crop dusters, military planes, helicopter emergency services and aerial services. And the two-dozen or so manufacturers associated with aviation including Rockwell Collins in Cedar Rapids which Tim calls Iowa’s “shining star.”



Add to that the indirect impact of travelers through airports and the induced impact realized by Iowa businesses and you come up with the \$18.4 billion — \$5.4 billion in direct economic activity, \$214 million in increased agricultural productivity and \$12.8 billion in increased business productivity according to the report, The Uses and Benefits of Aviation in Iowa. It’s available online at <http://www.iowadot.gov/aviation/aviationiniowa/aviationimpact.html> in either a 16-page summary or the full 203-page report.

When asked to rank their top ten factors in building or expanding business for the report, almost 500 Iowa businesses ranked proximity to a commercial service airport as third and proximity to a general aviation airport as sixth.

No wonder. Each year Iowa has 2.5 million commercial passenger boardings and nearly 250 million pounds of cargo move through airports.

With all that activity, even Superman would have his hands full.

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