

# Airport of the Month - Monticello, Iowa

By Tom Foster



Monticello Regional Airport terminal building.

Construction of public improvements often has “adverse” impacts not related to the intended purpose. State and federal rules require these impacts to be “mitigated.” If building something unavoidably requires filling a wetland, then a new one must be created. Noise impacts are common in airport improvements which can be offset by something as simple as a non-standard traffic pattern or as complicated as noise abatement procedures.

In the 1990s the Iowa Department of Transportation upgraded Highway 151 between Cedar Rapids and Dubuque to a four lane, limited access road. Construction would impact the Monticello Municipal Airport which turned out to be a good deal for the city. Not only did they get better surface transportation, but the DOT built them pretty much a new airport.

Construction was completed in 2001 and it's now the Monticello Regional Airport. The main runway is Portland Cement Concrete, lighted and 4400 feet long. There's a turf “cross wind” runway that's 2300 feet long. Paved taxiways make for safe ground operations, and easy access to the apron and hangar areas. Avgas and jet fuel are available. There's an FBO that does maintenance and aircraft sales.

A courtesy car provides ground transportation and there's flight instruction too.

Improved facilities usually lead to more activity and Monticello now hosts more than 40 aircraft. The longer runway encourages turbines to use the facility, and the turf cross wind runway makes the place friendly to tail draggers. In 2013 a new terminal building was dedicated to welcome aviators and passengers.

Monticello's first airport opened in 1929 but only lasted five years. It must have been popular, because it took two airports to replace it. Both continued operations until 1955. That year the first “Municipal Airport” was opened with a \$4000 grant from the State of Iowa. By 1964 better facilities were desired, so city developed an airport at the current site with some modern features. Long term commitments by local aviation supporters became the hall mark of the new airport.

Paul Emengreen moved to Monticello the same year the airport opened to be a corporate pilot and manage the airport. In 1971 he founded Monticello Aviation that offered flight training and full-service aircraft maintenance. Paul managed the airport for an incredible 50 years which must be

some kind of record except nobody's compiled statistics on longevity of airport managers.

Charlie Becker is a private pilot that joined the Monticello Airport Board in 1988 when he was already serving on the City Council. Mr. Becker guided the community through developing the airport to its current configuration including the recent building construction. His day job is directing "Camp Courageous" that offers recreational opportunities to the handicapped. If you get to Monticello and haven't had enough flying, the camp has a "zip line" available to the public. It also is a venue for social events and weddings and has an operating railroad.

A big annual event in Monticello is "The Great Jones County Fair." That's no exaggeration. Recent attendance has exceeded 100,000 individuals. Some big names have been featured ranging from Tex Ritter to The Motley Crue.

Besides the zip line and fair, there's plenty to do around Monticello. Summertime means canoeing, kayaking and tubing on the Makuoketa River and the gorgeous downtown is open in all seasons with lots of good places to eat.

Thomas Jefferson lived most of his life in Virginia and named his hilltop plantation home Monticello which translates as "little mountain." Having a house with an Italian name is consistent with Jefferson's fascination with that country including pasta. Among his lesser achievements, the author of the United States Declaration of Independence brought the first spaghetti making machine to the colonies. James

Hemings was the chef at Monticello and his efforts to satisfy his employer's yearning for pasta resulted in the invention of the American classic "Mac and Cheese."

Daniel Varvel founded the Iowa town in 1836 and named it after Jefferson's estate. Dairy farming and grain are important to Jones County, so all the ingredients for Mr. Hemings invention are available.

During a debate about public funding for General Aviation Airports a proponent noted that a modern airport costs about the same as a mile of four lane highway like U.S. 151 implying that the same investment could get you a mile by road or any place in the world by air. Thanks to a well-planned project at the beginning of the 21st century, the people around Monticello can use either for efficient travel.



ello Airport Board, guided the community through the airport.



Paul Elmengreen founded Monticello Aviation.