

# Airport of the Month - Ankeny

By Tom Foster

Ankeny, airport is located just across the Minnesota border, south of Albert Lea just off I-35.



Runway 36 has an instrument landing system.



John Fletcher Ankeny had an interesting life. The Ohio physician went west for the gold rush, became clerk of the first California legislature and visited Hawaii where he learned about growing pineapples. He returned to Ohio, got married and joined the presidential campaign of Abraham Lincoln. After the Civil War Ankeny moved his entire family (parents, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, and children) to Iowa.

In the 1870s, Ankeny purchased eight acres north of Des Moines where he built a hotel, boarding house and store that would later become the city of Ankeny. Doctor Ankeny next bought land in Florida where he applied the knowledge gained in Hawaii to growing pineapples on a plantation managed by his nephew Rollin Ankeny. They founded the Florida town of Ankona where John Fletcher Ankeny died in 1886. Ankona disappeared into Fort Pierce. Ankeny became a prosperous city with a first-class General Aviation airport.

Early in its history, Ankeny was an agricultural community. World War II brought industrialization in the form of a munitions plant and the population reached 1000 souls during “The War.” John Deere took over the plant literally

turning “swords into plow shares.” By the 1970s Ankeny’s population was 10 times larger and people began thinking about a General Aviation Airport. Local leaders cogitated over the idea without result until a major retail corporation said, “build it and we will come.”

Ankeny knit together a coalition with the cities of Altoona and Bondurant, plus Polk County to form the Polk County Aviation Authority. Building a new airport takes some patience and skill. The process started in 1989. Once the State of Iowa and the Federal Aviation Administration were on board, three sites were studied and one selected next to I-35 on the southeast side of Ankeny. A great pile of planning documents was assembled. Both airspace and environmental approvals were obtained, and 442 acres of land had been acquired so construction could begin.

PCAA, as it came to be known, opened the Ankeny Regional Airport in 1994 and a year later there were two large private hangars and two 10 unit “TEE” hangars owned by the



Authority. The original 4000-foot-long runway was soon inadequate and was extended 1500 feet in 1997. A paved and lighted 4200-foot-long secondary runway was added before the turn of the century. More hangars and a terminal building all followed. Improvements are being completed on a continuous basis. In the first quarter of the 21st century, Ankeny Regional Airport is home to about 100 aircraft.

To get there when the weather is less than ideal, three runways have RNAV/GPS instrument approaches. For aircraft stuck with 20th century technology, Runway 36 has an instrument landing system. Ankeny has an automated weather station to help pilots determine if the approaches are needed.

The FBO is the definition of full service. Aircraft are chartered, rented and sold there. They do all levels of maintenance and sell parts. Pilots can train for almost every certificate and rating at the flight school. Avgas and jet fuel can be purchased, ground transportation arranged.

General Aviation brings prosperity and people vote with their feet. The proof of those theses is Ankeny's population growth from 27,000 when the airport opened to 76,000. During that same period the number of people in Altoona double to 20,000, while the residents of Bondurant increased five-fold to 9500.

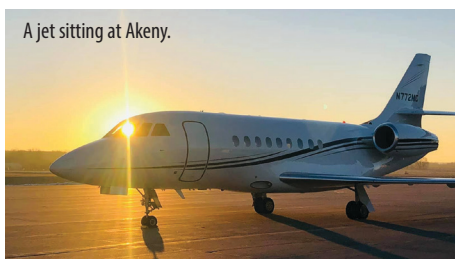
Continuing with local toponymy, the name Altoona is based on the Latin word altus because a surveyor discovered it was the highest point on the Des Moines Valley Railroad. Bondurant is named for the area's first settler and Polk County is one of 10 named for the 11th president of the United States.

Playing the role of Shoeless Joe Jackson in this saga is Casey's General Store. Casey's brought their headquarters and warehouse operation to Ankeny because of the Regional Airport. Founded in Iowa by Donald Lamberti, Casey's operates over 2500 convenience store/gas stations in 16 states. Lamberti's friend and partner was K.C. Fish hence the store name. Casey's doesn't sell aircraft fuel, but there's four within a mile of the Airport that sell pizza or snacks to keep passengers happy on the next leg. When the Ankeny Regional Airport opened in February 1994 the first airplane to arrive was owned by Casey's.

Ankeny Regional Airport has everything needed by business and private aviation, but pilots should be on their best aeronautical behavior there because it's also the home of the FAA Flight Standards District Office.



Ankeny Terminal with T hangars on the right.



A jet sitting at Ankeny.

