Acadiana Focus

Acadian Regional Airport:
An Overview of What’s on the Horizon

By Gail Boudreaux

“Conditions at Acadiana Regional Airport are promising” says Director, Rock Lasserre, Jr. The 4,000 acre complex has had its problems like everything else, but Lasserre says he feels the economic conditions have stabilized. “I see some very good areas of potential on the horizon that’s going to bring back new activity to the complex.”

One prospect is considering locating at the airport to go into catfish production. To begin operation, Lasserre says, the firm would need approximately forty acres of land for their ponds, with hopes of expanding to an additional forty acres a little later.

Another potential industry is a very large aviation manufacturing corporation. Attracting that prospect to ARA has been a joint effort between the Lafayette Economic Development Authority and Ibéria Officials, along with the State Department of Commerce and Industry. Lasserre says he’s very proud that Lafayette and New Iberia are working together on the project. However, it could be a year and a half or more before that company makes a final decision on their location.

Both the catfish and the aviation manufacturing would be diversification away from the oil industry.

Lasserre says the best thing that he’s been instrumental in accomplishing since he’s been at the airport has been the installation of the traffic control facility. It was needed for a safe environment and also for industrial development.

He said the larger manufacturing industries have a fleet of aircraft that they use to fly their corporate executives from one manufacturing site to another. Also, their insurance rates drop drastically if they locate at controlled airports.

The control tower also helps to discourage drug traffic and is instrumental in giving local weather conditions.

Lasserre says an obstacle to Acadiana Regional Airport has been the law, and the amount of legal requirements it imposes on all airports. In explaining, he said, “The present laws don’t allow for an airport development fund. State money for airports comes from the Department of Transportation and Development. The airports have to compete with highways, bridges, etc., so we’re at an unfair disadvantage.”

The present aviation laws were written in 1930 and were last updated in 1950. However, Lasserre said he and a group of twelve airport managers, together with the State and Federal Aviation Authorities, have revised and rewritten the aeronautical statutes calling for, among other things, an aviation development fund. If accepted, it would give airports direct access to state and federal funds. The Title II revisions are now under consideration by the Legislature.

The airport director says his biggest challenge at this time is to generate more revenue at the airport. He said, “The more we can develop our airport by creating a safer environment or additional services, the better off we’re going to be in attracting industry to the area to create jobs for our local people.”

“As long as I’m here I’m going to do everything in my power to make it the best I can for us, because if we allow it to slip away or not be well kept, not only will we not attract additional industries, but the ones that are here will go away,” Lasserre added.

Statistics show that there are 200 airports in the state of Louisiana; and of the 65 that are public, Acadiana Regional is the sixth most active (activity being measured by landings and take-offs). It also has the longest concrete runway in the state, and the second longest overall, with the New Orleans International in first place. Acadiana’s 5,000 foot seaway is also a tremendous asset.

In closing, Rock Lasserre says “My awkward little child (meaning the airport) is shaping up quite nicely and I think the future is promising!”