

Longer runway boosts business

As air traffic picks up, so do fuel sales at Oconee airport

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Business has picked up at the Oconee County Regional Airport since the runway was extended to 5,000 feet and opened up for take-offs and landings five months ago.

Airport Director Kevin Short said Tuesday that he's seen the positive trend through increased activity on the runway and fuel sales.

Revenues from Jet-A fuel sales during a three-month period that ended Sept. 30 increased by almost 64 percent over the same period a year ago, according to a report generated by Short.

The airport rang up fuel sales of \$170,370.

Last year the length of the runway was 4,400 feet. The 600-foot extension cost about \$4.8 million with the Federal Aviation Administration picking up 95 percent of the project's price tag.

The longer runway attracts larger aircraft, and the Oconee airport is getting busier as word gets around about its improved runway and taxiway.

According to Short, 34,867 gallons of Jet-A fuel were sold at the airport in July, August and September after the extended runway opened. That was 36 percent more gallons of Jet-A fuel sold than during the same three-month period a year ago when the runway was shorter.



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

The Oconee County Regional Airport has been experiencing increased traffic and fuel sales since the extended runway opened in May.

SEE BOOSTS, PAGE A5

BOOSTS: T-hanger project is done

FROM PAGE A1

Short said fuel sales increased moderately in June and July. However, he said fuel sales picked up even more in August and September.

It's no coincidence that the "good jump" in sales the past two months has been aided by the Clemson University Tigers playing four football games at home.

However, local officials expect the improved runway to sustain airport traffic and fuel sales as word gets around about the upgraded facilities.

Short added that the T-hanger project at the airport also has been completed.

"We got authorization from the county to occupy the hangars at 11 a.m. Friday," Short said. "By 4 that afternoon the hangars were taken."

The positive turnaround for the airport is in sharp contrast to the problems that surfaced during the runway extension last year.

State regulators shut down the project for months after they learned that the engineer heading the project in Oconee falsified a permit.

The bizarre events surrounding the delays in completing the project have led to a three-party multi-million dollar lawsuit between the project contractor, the engineering firm and Oconee County that is still pending.