Southwest readies for takeoff

Upstate residents may know next week the where, when, how much

By Rudolph Bell and Angelia Davis
STAFF WRITERS

Local travelers may want to start paying more attention to the price of airline tickets at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport next week.

Southwest Airlines is scheduled to release more details about its previously announced service at GSP on Wednesday and, according to the airport's executive director, will disclose destinations, fares and start dates for the first time.

GSP has been one of the most expensive airports of its size in the country, but the arrival of new competition from discount airline Southwest is expected to put downward pressure on ticket prices — a longtime goal of community leaders.

Laurel Moffat, spokeswoman for Dallas-based Southwest, confirmed that executives from the airline are scheduled Wednesday to make announcements at GSP and Charleston, where Southwest also plans new service next year.

She wouldn't give details but pointed out that Southwest has previously said it planned to announce fares and schedules for GSP and Charleston this fall.

Dave Edwards, the airport's executive director, told airport commissioners that Southwest is expected to announce desti-

See AIRLINE on page 3A

AIRLINE

FROM PAGE1A

nations, number of flights, start dates and fares.

"They're going to announce where they'll be flying to, how many flights a day, what the actual start date is, and the introductory fares at the same time," Edwards said.

He didn't elaborate, telling airport commission Chairman Roger Milliken that the airline "will not let me say anything. They're going to say it then."

Edwards told *The Greenville News* in August that Southwest was considering service from GSP to at least five cities not served by the airport now — Boston, Nashville, Denver, Las Vegas and Baltimore. He also said at the time that Southwest was thinking about service to at least three other cities already served by other airlines from GSP – Chicago, Houston and Tampa.

Edwards said then that he recommended those destinations to the airline, and it was considering them, but, "We don't know what Southwest is going to choose."

Airport officials are preparing for Southwest with a $100 million terminal expansion that was approved for negotiation with a design firm Wednesday.

A Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman has said the agency would review Southwest's operation specifications, including the type of aircraft to be used at GSP and Charleston, airport facilities and maintenance and fueling requirements, to certify those airports can be safely served by the carrier.

FAA officials with knowledge of the review couldn't be reached for comment Wednesday.