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Southwest to provide economic boost to Upstate

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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CLEMSON — Southwest Airlines' decision to begin flying to Greenville and Charleston is expected to generate a strong economic, business and personal impact on the Upstate.

The announcement last week thrilled local representatives as the airline carrier will begin service in May 2011.

"Anything that will create more jobs and entice businesses to come to the Upstate is something I will always support," said Rep. Thomas Alexander, R-Walhalla. "It will be a great thing for the area."

Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, said because of this, South Carolina's future is even stronger.

"This is a good sign for our state's free market and business community," he said. "Announcements like this are positive indicators that South Carolina's economy is headed in the right direction and that our state is on the road to recovery."

Mark Malmgren, representative from Small World Travel in Clemson, said Southwest will provide more than economic improvement.

"Let's face it, people are fed up with other airlines trying to get every penny from consumers," he said. "Southwest has a record that blows the competition away. They don't have any baggage fees, they don't have any cancellation fees when other airlines start at $150, they've had the best cumulative on-time performance for 20 years, they have the best customer service rating, they've never had a fatal crash, they have senior discounts and their fares are the lowest. We are very lucky to have their business now."



A travel agent at Small World Travel points to a diagram of Southwest's current flight plans. Soon, the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport will be added to that map.

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Southwest hasn't announced its routes from the Palmetto State yet, but Malmgren speculates there will be at least 10 destination cities available via direct flights.

"People's mentality will change about flying now," he said. "Before, waiting until the last minute cost you even more money. Southwest doesn't work that way. The longer you wait, if there are seats, they will be cheaper. People will drive less, which may help gas prices go down. More people will travel to the Upstate for leisure too. Not to mention, more businesses will be apt to settle here with easy and inexpensive flight options. It will be a very positive thing for the Upstate."

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