Travelers hail arrival of discount carrier

Many say cheaper fares, direct flights will be big draw

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Southwest Airlines will make traveling a lot easier for Caroline Melby's family of five.

The young mother had just landed at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport to visit family after flying in from Dallas on a trip that included a stopover in Atlanta.

With her 18-month-old daughter nestled close to her chest and 3-year-old son playing next to a buggy loaded with strollers and car seats, Melby was thrilled to hear that the low-fare carrier plans to locate at GSP.

The announcement came Tuesday, when Southwest said it would begin providing service to the Upstate through GSP and the Lowcountry through the Charleston International Airport in 2011. The airline said fees and destinations would be revealed later.

Like Melby, GSP passengers were excited about the announcement. They raved about the airline's customer service, direct flights and money-saving policy that doesn't charge for baggage.

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JOHN OLSON / Staff

Caroline Melby of Austin, Texas, who often flies Southwest, calls it a family-friendly airline.

TRAVEL

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A travel industry expert told *The Greenville News* that is a typical reaction from leisure travelers because Southwest caters to them.

"Southwest has not historically been very strong in the business travel market because they don't offer first class, thus no upgrades to first class that business travelers like," said David Rowell, publisher of The Travel Insider.

"And while Southwest has been perceived as a low-fare carrier, the fact is their average fare tends to be in line with full-fare carriers.

"But what they don't have are the crazy high fares when you desperately need to travel. There are definite benefits to leisure travelers at having Southwest in the market."

Melby said, "Southwest is just great for families. I love the checking in. You can check in the day before, and they don't charge for bags."

The Melbys always fly Southwest when they can, she said, because it's affordable, and it has direct flights.

Joe Boglino, who was in Greenville for the BMW Charity Pro-Am, also is familiar with the airline.

A frequent flyer for business, Boglino was set for a weekend of golf and had already traded in his suit for a visor and jeans.

He called Southwest a "very good airline, very customer-friendly and inexpensive, where bags fly free."

Meanwhile, Frank and Nancy Trythall were returning to Sacramento, Calif., after seeing their son graduate from Clemson University over the weekend.

The couple, who have family all over the country, often fly Southwest to visit their children.

"We love it. It's the only way you can get up and down the West Coast. The prices are good, and they get us where we need to be," Nancy Trythall said.



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Nancy Trythall, Sacramento, Calif., resident



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Joe Boglino, business traveler