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Local airport not significantly impacted by private pilot decline

Thursday, June 25, 2015
By Kate Padilla, Daily Reporter Staff

Despite the nationwide decline of private pilot numbers, Gayle Brandt and Tim Steffen, representatives of the Northwest Iowa Regional Airport, noted the local impact is not significant.



"Nationally, it's definitely true," Brandt said. "We're seeing the significance in the airline industry. But here, I don't know. The influx is year to year. Last year we had a couple of students and this year we don't have any, but it's not abnormal. We do have a few nontraditional students."

The local airport, she said, has more buildings and more companies on its campus than it did when Great Lakes Aviation operated out of the facility. In addition, the runway capacity -- the amount of weight the runway can hold, due to the thickness of the concrete -- is greater.

The Northwest Iowa Regional Airport has two runways, one 5,000 feet long and one 6,000 feet long.

Of the 28 T-hangar spaces, five multi-capacity hangars and one 70-foot hangar door large enough to accommodate a small regional jet, only one larger-capacity hangar is available. The others are already rented out; there is a waiting list for the space.

"We're the largest airport within 100 miles," Steffen said.

"We get good activity," Brandt said. "A lot of times when the smaller planes go across the country, they just need somewhere to stop quick and fill up and get out again. We have the runway length and the instrument approach system for them to do that."

In addition, the airport offers a charter service and, with the help of other local industries, provides other amenities for those who fly in.

"Auto shops and dealerships run rental cars back and forth all of the time," Brandt said. "Right now, all of the motels in town are booked."

"We're fortunate because we're in the resort area," she continued. "We get a lot of seasonal traffic."

There are two other airports closer to the Lakes area, but the NWRA is better able to accommodate the size of some of the aircraft.

"We're another door to the community that isn't always recognized," Brandt said.

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