

LEDCO, county look to better market East Texas Regional Airport

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Eric Basinger SWEPCO



Wayne Mansfield
LEDCO president/CEO

Longview Economic Development Corp. is pursuing a marketing tool it hopes could attract more and bigger commercial development opportunities to East Texas Regional Airport.

LEDCO President/CEO Wayne Mansfield, Airport Director Roy Miller, AEP SWEPCO Economic and Business Development Manager Eric Basinger and Gregg County Judge Bill Stoudt are part of “an informal group” interested in attaining a certification Mansfield says has paid dividends for other communities.

It’s an idea officials are enthusiastic about.

“There’s no question that the time is now, and I think going forward it’s going to be time,” Stoudt said. “We’ve got 900 acres of pretty pristine land out there to develop.”

Said Mansfield: “We’ve got the pieces of the puzzle. We just need someone to help us put the puzzle together, and that’s what this program hopefully will do.”



Bill Stoudt
Gregg County judge

Known as AEROready, the certification was developed to help aerospace prospects identify potential locations.

An AEROready-certified community, region or site is considered ready for an aerospace industry, having undergone a deep analysis that makes sure the community has a supply of labor, opportunity and necessary infrastructure.



Roy Miller

Airport director

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According to information on the aeroready.us website, the certification programs have helped in recruiting or expanding a number of aerospace companies to communities.

Communities such as Mount Pleasant and Shreveport already have been analyzed to show they can handle potential aerospace companies such as Boeing and Airbus, Mansfield said.

Two consultants, Tucson Roberts and Robert Ingram, developed the certification program, in which they would review the Gregg County airport and its aviation programs.

Mansfield, who came to Longview in 2017 from Vicksburg, Mississippi, said he remembers Ingram's time as an economic developer for Mobile, Alabama. Ingram was there in September 2015, when that city won the Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility where A319, A320 and A321 aircraft are assembled.

"It's pretty comprehensive," Mansfield said in describing AEROready's three-month assessment process. He compared it to the Foreign Direct Investment Ready certification LEDCO recently attained for the Longview area.

As in the process for that certification, AEROready consultants will review infrastructure, meet with stakeholders and evaluate the local pipeline for aviation. LeTourneau University will play a key role in that, because of its College of Aviation and Aeronautical Science based on the airport grounds, Mansfield said.

LeTourneau University and the airport's 10,000-foot runway are two big contributing factors in the certification, he said. He's also gotten support from LeTourneau President Dale Lunsford.

"He's on board with supporting this effort. Plus, they have the ability since they work in the aviation arena," Mansfield said. "They have the ability to knock on doors to companies like General Dynamics and Boeing and Raytheon and Lockheed."

AEROready consultants "will develop a marketing plan in terms of helping us market those aviation-related companies, and then also help us identify potential companies that may be expanding, so I'm really excited about the marketing aspect of it and then the identification access also," he said.

If the East Texas Regional Airport qualifies as AEROready, Stouidt said the full Gregg County Commissioners' Court would have to finally approve the certification.

That said, he welcomes marketing and commercial growth for the airport.

According to a master plan completed earlier this year, the airport generates an estimated \$73 million in annual general aviation economic activity. Of that, about \$22.2 million is devoted to salary, wages and benefits for nearly 650 workers at various employers.

“First of all, we do not have a department that would match what LEDCO could do in terms of developing a property. We don’t have that as county government,” Stoudt said, “and our relationship and partnership with LEDCO is excellent in working together with other industries around Longview, and if they come up with a plan, a system for marketing the airport to more clients and bigger clients, then I’m all for it.”

Commercial sites around the East Texas Regional Airport come with advantages like low leasing rates and the region’s lowest county property tax rate, the judge added, calling LEDCO a great asset for marketing those properties.

“It’s time now. It’s been time for years,” Stoudt said. “You’re getting people moving heavy iron out, and when I say heavy iron — big jet, helicopters from Shreveport. We’ve got some people from Tyler who had airplanes out there.”

He agreed with Mansfield that all the pieces are in place for development.

“We’re willing to work with anybody in terms of incentives,” Stoudt said. “If the economy stays like it is — low interest rates, cheap money — it’s a no-brainer.”