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St. Tammany Regional Airport gains 317 acres for expansion

Posted by [rrhoden](#) April 16, 2007 5:14PM

By Charlie Chapple
St. Tammany bureau

The St. Tammany Regional Airport near Abita Springs has increased in size eightfold with the parish's acquisition of 317 acres from Abita Springs Timber Co.

The additional land will allow the parish to extend the airport runway to accommodate corporate jets, Parish President Kevin Davis said at a news conference Monday.

A contract to extend the runway from 3,000 to 4,000 feet and do major drainage improvements at the airport is expected to be awarded next month, parish administrative assistant James Smith said.

The project, with an estimated cost of \$1 million, will take about 90 days to complete. The result, Davis said, will be an economic boost for western St. Tammany because it will have an airport that can handle corporate aircraft.

"Our goal is to make it large enough for corporate jets carrying five to 10 passengers," Davis said.



Staff photo by Ted Jackson
A plane takes off Monday at St. Tammany Regional Airport near Abita Springs

St. Tammany officials called the news conference to announce that the timber company had "donated" the land, with an appraised value of \$2.23 million, to the parish for the expansion of the airport.

But Abita Springs Timber Co. will receive future developmental credit from the parish equal to the appraised value of the land, according to an agreement expected to be approved by the Parish Council on May 3.

The company owns 8,000 acres of undeveloped timberland next to the airport, where 20 airplanes and an Acadian Ambulance helicopter are now based. And under the agreement, the company can use any portion of its credit to pay for parish developmental fees, including impact fees, "or any other administrative charges and/or costs . . . of any type or character," if and when the company decides to develop its adjacent property.

Under the agreement, any unused portion of the credit will increase in value annually based on the Consumer Price Index. The agreement also allows the company to transfer any portion of its credit to a third party for the development of any part of the 8,000 acres.

Davis said the parish has been negotiating with property owners since 2002 to acquire land to meet the future needs of the airport.

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Had the deal with the timber company not been done, the parish could have lost federal dollars funneled through the state to upgrade the airport, including the \$1 million for the first phase of improvements, Davis said. The parish does not have the money to make an outright purchase of the property, he said.

The parish president thanked company officials "for their donation of land to allow for airport expansion. This is an important step in improving aviation services in the parish and providing for long-term economic incentives for our community."

Abita Springs Timber Co. is a local company whose main investors include Ollie Edmunds, a New Orleans orthopedic surgeon, his sister Jane Edmunds Novak of Jacksonville, Fla., and Keith Chunn and Darryl Berger, both from New Orleans.

Berger, a developer, predicted that the upgrade of the airport "will have an extraordinary impact on economic development in the parish and the region."

The property increases the size of the airport from 45 to 362 acres. The airport now has room for a 7,000-foot runway, Smith said.

Future plans at the facility includes building 20 new hangars, a new terminal and three corporate hangars, Smith said.

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