

Worthy of jet-setters

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Flying the friendly skies has been a lot easier in and out of Crescent City ever since the Del Norte County Regional Airport's much-needed terminal opened earlier this year following renovation.

Doug and Loni LeCain came to Crescent City from Modesto, California, and flew on to Oakland. "It's the easiest airport experience I've ever had," Loni LeCain said. "I like the new terminal. It's clean and all the windows give it an open, airy feel."

"I'd definitely fly out of here again," added Doug LeCain.

Airport director Randy Hooper said, "There was a big impetus for updating the facility, considering how old it was." He said the airport has been in Crescent City since the 1940s.

It was used and operated by the Department of Defense during World War II, before being transferred to Del Norte County.

The county inherited a relic of the pre-Cold War era. "The terminal was a cinderblock building, a tiny little space that existed before 9/11," Hooper said, approaching his first anniversary as the airport's director.

“After 9/11, there were additional security requirements. So, a little modular trailer was placed behind it. It was quite an experience to fly out of Crescent City before this (updated) terminal.”

Funding for a new terminal came through the Federal Aviation Administration’s Airport Improvement Program, which financed about 85 percent of the project’s costs, with the rest coming from a local match.

In total, the renovation’s expenditures were \$18 million, including terminal (\$13 million alone), parking lot, new apron and water-line extensions.

Phase 1 was: water and sewer, and road realignment, breaking ground in spring 2016.

Phase 2: the terminal itself, plus parking lot and aircraft apron projects, which broke ground in early summer 2017. Hooper said this portion of the project required the realignment of Dale Rupert Road in front of the airport.

The terminal debuted Feb. 22, with more than 500 attendees at the ribbon cutting.

“It was well attended. We were anticipating 200 to 300, because there was a lot of excitement in community.”

As he walked through the terminal, Hooper said the question isn’t what’s new. The question is what isn’t new.

The holding area now is more spacious and with more seating, so passengers are not elbow to elbow as they wait. And the lobby is much larger.

Hooper said they tried to add things passengers would ask for. “There’s even an upstairs with a nice sitting area that’s a fantastic place to catch a sunset over Castle Rock,” he said.

“Plus, it features an art display by Dallard Association of Culture Awareness, which has an Arts in Public Places rotating program that changes quarterly.”

Commercial air service is provided by Contour. Based out of Tennessee, Hooper said, Contour wanted to establish a presence on the West Coast. Crescent City was the first hub the airline served, in April 2018, to and from Oakland.

“People seem to be very happy with them,” Hooper said. “They operate a regional jet, which we’d never had before in Crescent City, just propeller airplanes. That’s great, because you can get to the Bay Area in less than an hour.”

Contour runs weekly specials for as little as \$40 to \$50, he said. The 37-passenger plane recently was downgraded to 30 passengers to meet certain FAA certification requirements, thus providing plenty of leg room and overhead storage, Hooper said.

In addition to commercial service, Crescent City’s regional airport also offers general aviation, with a dozen or so private pilots flying out of here, he said.

In addition, air medical transport Cal-Ore Life Flight has a Beechcraft King Air providing transportation to larger hospitals outside of Crescent City, be it the Bay Area or Medford or Portland.

Cargo carriers out of Crescent City include FedEx about six days a week, and UPS another four or five days.

But the newest addition to the terminal is an onsite food vendor. “In all our years of commercial service, there’s never been food,” said Hooper. “Passengers have been clear - they want food. The most the old terminal had were vending machines.”

A coffee vendor’s efforts to provide service fell through because there was no commercial kitchen on site.

However, food trailer vendor Mary Lou Debacker had been serving up her menu of smoked meats at the harbor and farmers markets, and she offered her services.

“The timing worked out. She now sets up before planes arrive, and she departs after the plane leaves,” Hooper said.

Her Just Perfect Food trailer will be transitioning to a morning food menu when the airport loses its midday flights at the end of summer, offering coffees, breakfast burritos, bananas and fruits, he said.