

LOCAL

Allegiant Air, Okaloosa County celebrate new concourse at Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport



Devon Ravine

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Hundreds of community and business leaders joined staff from Allegiant Air and the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport on Monday morning to celebrate the completion of a new concourse dedicated to serving Allegiant Air passengers.

"No other airline has invested into our community like Allegiant has. In fact, no airline in the 65-year history of VPS has made the level of commitment that Allegiant Air has," Okaloosa County Airports Director Tracy Stage said, using the airport's three-letter code.

Indeed, Allegiant contributed \$11.4 million to the project, which represents the bulk of concourse construction costs. The five-gate, 26,000-square-foot Concourse C is located on the west side of the airport's main terminal and will serve Allegiant Air passengers exclusively.

'Monumental project': DeFuniak Springs Municipal Airport getting \$6.9 million terminal

It's a big commitment for an airline that is a relative newcomer to Okaloosa County.

Allegiant started service at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport in 2016, with service to St. Louis and Cincinnati. By 2018, the carrier was providing service to 22 destinations and announced VPS as its newest base of operations. Currently, Allegiant Air has service from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport to 35 destinations, mostly to smaller airports in the east and mid-west. The airline's primary focus is on tourists, so the number of flights vary according to the season.

"You've got something here that is incredibly special, and when people come to Destin they feel it," said Keith Hansen, Allegiant's senior vice president of airport and government

affairs. Destin has become one of the premier destinations in the country, Hansen told the crowd.

"Your secret is out; everybody knows now what Destin is, what Fort Walton Beach is," Hansen said. "They are coming here in droves and we couldn't be happier to be the vessel that is bringing them from places all over the country."

As evidence of this, during Monday's ribbon cutting, an Allegiant Air Airbus A320 arrived from Cincinnati, dropping about 180 passengers into the new facility.

Recently: New flight to Destin-Fort Walton Beach from Minneapolis begins in April 2023

Six retail locations in concourse will offer food, beverages and more

In addition to new concourse building, Stage said the airport's current concession vendors, Oakwell and Faber, have invested \$5.1 million in six separate retail locations in the concourse offering food, beverage and other retail items. Stage said they worked with the airport to come up with designs that reflected the character of Okaloosa County. Destiny Food and Drink has a bar shaped like the hull of a ship, and Doolittle Annex, is a small airstream trailer-style restaurant serving food at the far end of the concourse.

"You can literally sit down in front of floor-to-ceiling windows and watch the entire airfield facility," said Stage.

Concourse C also has its own TSA security checkpoint. Departing passengers will still check in for their flights at the airport's main terminal and arriving passengers will still use the baggage claim area in the main terminal.

Stage said he's particularly proud that the airport has been able to increase its capacity without taking on any debt.

"We broke two million (passengers) last year, and we'll break two million again this year," said Stage. "In the past five years to date, more than 9.3 million passengers have traveled through VPS. Two point six million, or 27%, of the total passenger count is from Allegiant Air."

Stage said that translates to billions of dollars of impact for Okaloosa County.

"It's a big win to have Allegiant here at home at VPS," Okaloosa County Commissioner Mel Ponder said. "We're thankful to have them here; it's great partnership for our community."

