

Thursday, August 7, 2008

NJAA Meet and Greet Meeting

NJAA "Meet and Greet" Meeting at Trenton Mercer Airport  
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Chairman Justin Edwards opened the meeting at 10:15am.

Thanks to Justin and the staff of Trenton Mercer Airport, the meeting was enjoyed and attended by many. The breakfast was arranged for by the staff of Trenton Mercer and sponsored by Engineered Arresting Systems Corporation (ESCO) of Logan, NJ... the world leader in Engineered Arresting Systems Corporation. (This product safely decelerates aircraft in overrun emergencies.)

Present: Aaron Watson (Director of the Mercer County Department of Transportation), Mark Ciccone (Technical Operations Mgr. FAA Trenton-Mercer Airport), Hugh Delong III (ESCO), John Bosco (ESCO), David Heald (ESCO), Tim Buzinski (ESCO), Peter Rothwell (Dassault Falcon Jet), Mike Stoddard (MAAC), Jennifer Sneed (Senator Lautenberg's office), Joe Blasenstein (MCCC Aviation Program), Judie Stillwagon (MCCC), Byron Marshall (MCCC), John Raimondi (MCCC), Carol Hoppock (MCCC), Clare Mansfield (NJDOT), Jim Mileski (NJDOT), Gregory McDonough (NJDOT), Wolcott Blair (Ronson Aviation), David Nuss (Eastern Region Helicopter Association), David Holmes (TTN ARFF), Gregory Winten (AOPA), Joey Colleran (AOPA), Jack Martins (Urban Engineers), F. Kulka (Urban Engineers), Bob Boyer (pilot/aircraft owner), Daniel Markind (attorney at Eckert Seamans), Fran Srouse (L. Robert Kimball & Associates), Dennis Plorie, James Mackenzie (DMJM Aviation), Thomas Guy Jadico (Corporation Aviation Hangars at TTN), Gary Shinder (BANA Group), William Holt (Trenton Mercer Hangar Assoc.), Barbara and Frank Hicinbothem (Kenmarson Aero Center), Harry Redfearn (Hertz Car Rental), Thor Solberg, Jr. (Solberg Airport), Tom Thatcher, Jim Pate (Trenton Tower), John Anderson (PHS Inspector), Justin Edwards (Trenton-Mercer Airport/NJAA), Arlene Feldman (NJAA), Jack McNamara (Aviation Attorney/NJAA), Bill Leavens (MAAC/NJAA), Jack Elliott (NJAA), Bob Checchio (MAAC/NJAA), Roger Moog (DVRPC/NJAA), Rich Levesque (Insight Consulting Services, Inc.) and Suzy Solberg Nagle (Solberg Airport/NJAA),

Chairman Justin Edwards explained the "Meet and Greet" meetings are to educate and bring members up to date and to also gain insight from members and colleagues who attend. The meetings will rotate around the state. Recently NJAA has held meetings at Princeton, Essex County, and Morristown before this meeting at Trenton. NJAA will try to schedule the next meeting in the southern part of the state.

NJAA applications are available along with the NJAA Palm card. Justin encouraged everyone to join as NJAA needs everyone's help to have true success.

Justin introduced Aaron Watson, Justin's boss, the Director of the Mercer County Department of Transportation..

Justin then introduced former NJDOT Director Division of Aeronautics, attorney, pilot, former FAA Eastern Region Director and current NJAA President Arlene Feldman.

Arlene thanked Justin Edwards for his energy and continuous communication.

Arlene recognized the following people in attendance:

NJAA board members present: Bob Checchio, Jack McNamara, Suzy Nagle, Roger Moog, Bill Leavens, Rich Lebesque (representing Deanna Lykins from Insight Consulting Services) and Jack Elliott.

Jennifer Sneed from Senator Lautenberg's office

Mike Stoddard..President of MAAC...NJAA has formed an alliance with MAAC (that represents the recreational side of aviation).

The representatives for ESCO who developed EMAS (Engineered Material Arresting System). EMAS has averted traffic accidents. Senator Lautenberg grandfathered an airport that cannot meet the requirement for a safety area to lengthen its runway when the EMAS product is used. Jim Mileski from NJDOT.

Gregory Winten...the new AOPA representative who is also a lawyer and pilot.

David Nuss from the Eastern Region Helicopter Council.

Arlene reminisced that when she was with the FAA she would tell the audience that she was from the FAA and here to help you and the audience would laugh. Now it is no laughing matter.

Arlene is representing NJAA and she is here to help you.

NJAA was formed out of a need for aviation businesses to have proper representation. Not many people are aware of the positive effects of NJAA. NJAA is very active now with its new board of directors. AOPA, NBAA, NATO, the NJ Chamber of Commerce and NJDOT recognize NJAA as the voice of NJ aviation. Dean Saucier of NBAA wanted to be here today, but had another commitment in Connecticut.

NJAA will participate in the three day League of Municipalities meeting in November in Atlantic City. All airport owners and operators are encouraged to attend.

NJAA participated in Advocacy Week at Trenton. NJAA met with legislators, exhibited educational information and handed out materials and goodies.

NJAA Palm cards are available to use as a tool to explain what general aviation means to the state. Arlene encouraged everyone to use them.

NJAA has written many letters including letters to the President and to Congress in opposition to user fees and Readington Township's eminent domain action against Solberg Airport and in favor of full FAA funding for the airports.

NJAA wrote letters in support of the appointment of Bob Sturgell as FAA Administrator. Bob is an airline pilot, general aviation pilot and was the guest speaker at the 2008 AHOF dinner.

NJAA educated the legislature regarding legislation to prevent future privately owned public use airports from being taken by eminent domain. There is presently a Senate bill to prevent the taking by eminent domain of any privately owned public use airport that has sold its development rights to the state.

NJAA issued press releases explaining the problem privately owned public use airports face with high property taxes as was the case with Twin Pines Airport which sadly closed recently.

NJAA wrote letters in support of Somerset Airport being able to build a structure for Medevac.

NJAA learned that the State Police aviation program used funds designated for flight training for something else. NJAA was approached by Senator Diane Allen to educate the public on the benefits of the Senator's bill to prevent future misappropriation of funds.

NJAA learned from Roger Moog (board member) that Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission has for the past 25 years been funded by the FAA to do an aviation systems planning for this region. This year the money has been reduced making it difficult for DVRPC to provide an overall view of the airports.

NJAA initiated contact with NJDEP to establish a single point of contact to smooth the permitting process and enable airports to take funds and not forfeit them because of NJDEP permitting delays. The FAA moved forward with NJDEP and NJDOT without NJAA and has scheduled a one day seminar on September 23rd in Trenton for airports. All NJ public use airports are encouraged to attend.

NJAA is educating the public about the Mercer County aviation program being in jeopardy. Mercer County will accept pledges to keep the program going and anyone interested in helping should reach out to MCCC.

NJAA Newsletter is now called The Aviator. When Jack Elliott was the editor the newsletter was released monthly. Now Arlene Feldman is the editor and the format has changed to quarterly issues. Any email address listed on the sign in sheet will be sent future newsletters. NJAA sends the newsletter to the media, legislators, members and potential members. Arlene stated NJAA welcomes any articles and information on issues from members and other colleagues. Morristown Municipal Airport funded the last newsletter. Arlene asked anyone interested in advertising in the newsletter to contact her.

NJAA is planning on an Awards/Membership banquet in March/April 2009. Sponsorships will be greatly appreciated. Arlene she can be reached at NJAviationAssn@gmail.com.

Arlene opened the discussion to the audience.

Jack McNamara, NJAA board member and author of the General Aviation Study Commission talked about the importance of every airport in NJ. The GASC 300 page document is available on line. Now NJ has less than fifty general aviation public use airports. People ask do we need all of these airports? Arlene explained that 86% of people flying on corporate aircraft are not CEO's but the workers out there saving the company money.

Thor Solberg (one of the owners of Solberg Airport along with Lorraine Solberg and Suzy Solberg Nagle) came forward to give an update on the eminent domain situation of Solberg Airport. Arlene stated Solberg has been involved in litigation with its host municipality Readington Township for a long time. Readington Township took money from the community to take over a great portion (85%) of the Solberg Airport property. Readington Township claims the taking is for open space but Solberg (and many others) contend it really wants to control the airport. Readington is using eminent domain to get the airport from the family and to keep the family from lengthening the runway and bringing in more revenue for the state.

Thor Solberg stated the late Thor Solberg, Sr. purchased the original land in 1939 and received approval for a commercial airport from Readington Township in 1941. When Solberg Airport completed a FAA master plan study that called for modernization of the airport, Readington Township objected. The Airport Safety Zoning Act gave NJDOT final approval of what would happen at an airport and Readington Township objected to this legislation as well. Readington Township in circumventing the ASZA decided to take all the land away that was needed for any modernization. Technically Readington took title to 85% of the airport, leaving the land that may make the airport uneconomical to survive. Solberg Airport challenged Readington Township's right to take and the Superior Court ruled against the airport. Now the airport has filed a legal brief appealing this decision and is waiting in the appellate process. The case is expected to be heard early next year. In Readington Township's Appellate Brief, Readington claimed that airports have no public benefit in NJ. Per Readington Township's brief, all Readington needs to do is to say it needs open space and use the land as open space and it can take any land through the open space act. Thor solicited the support of NJAA in conjunction with NJDOT, and national aviation organizations to file an Amicus Brief. The Commissioner of Transportation's authority is being challenged. The aviation system needs to be protected. Any one interested in receiving a copy of the brief can contact thor@solbergairport.com.

Jack McNamara added that the General Aviation Study Commission Report showed how airports provide jobs and other economic benefits. The report was sent to every member of the state legislature and to sister states as well. The report was effective in altering legislation in fourteen states, but unfortunately not too effective in NJ. The purchase of development rights in NJ was a positive effect. A property tax relief bill for public use privately owned airports was on the floor, but did not carry. The concept is there (for property tax relief) so hopefully it will return.

New Jersey hired an outside consultant to do a study of aviation in the state. The consultant was asked to take a clean slate and design an airport system and then overlay the existing system. The most glaring finding of those professionals was that between MMU and TTN at one time in the early 90's when there was the greatest growth of corporate activity and greatest need for an airport to handle corporate aircraft, a dot was placed where a modernized airport should be ideally located. The northeast corner of Solberg Airport was within a mile of exactly where they said it should be located. Solberg had all the land needed and the certification to be a business aircraft airport.

There are 51 sovereigns...one national government...and 50 state governments... Readington Township's legislative authority has usurped the authority of the sovereign and adversely effected the economy of the state. The entity of Readington Township is not really a township. It is really five people. If they dislike the airport or the owners, they can use eminent domain to vent a

personal vendetta...or simply do away with the airport because it is next to their personal property.

What a travesty it is. Jack stated everyone's help is needed so that it does not happen again.

Someone from the audience asked Jack why Judge Ciccone would rule against Solberg. Jack responded that he has been practicing law all his life and does not always understand judge's rulings. Judge Ciccone ruled favorably in initial motion then went against her initial ruling..

Justin Edwards stated that perception is reality. Justin said there is an "activist handbook" that tells readers how to make themselves more powerful than they really are. Aviation people do not band together.

Mike Stoddard (President of MAAC) reminded the audience of the saying ".put your money where your mouth is". MAAC did. MAAC gave \$500 to Solberg Airport and \$500 to Somerset to help each airport with its legal defense fund. Mike invited everyone to come to the MAAC Annual Fly In Meeting to be held this year at Somerset Airport on Saturday, September 14th. The \$10 admission fee will help MAAC continue to help airport legal defense funds and every participant will enjoy a hamburger or a hot dog.

The official portion of the "meet and greet" closed at 11:05 am. Justin thanked everyone for coming and asked them to stick around and eat, drink, network and help general aviation..

Suzy Solberg Nagle  
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