

Chautauqua ready to construct maintenance hangar

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Chautauqua Airlines will open a new \$8.5 million aircraft maintenance building and crew base at Louisville International Airport by late December, tripling the number of planes the airline can work on overnight and bringing another 130 jobs to Louisville.

Construction on the 60,250-square-foot, six-bay facility will begin in the next few days, airline spokesman Warren Wilkinson said yesterday at an airport-grounds ceremony that drew Gov. Ernie Fletcher and Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, along with airport and economic-development officials.

"One of the things that we have going for us in Kentucky is that Louisville has become a major center for logistics and aircraft maintenance," Fletcher said. "And this expansion will help us even grow that industry here. It will help us attract other business."

"This is the groundbreaking effort for the first of what we hope will be a lot of operations right along this area," Abramson said. The maintenance operation also raises the possibility of expanded passenger service as Chautauqua brings planes in for service, he said.

Chautauqua, which is headquartered in Indianapolis, employs 171 people in Louisville at a temporary airport facility. About 90 are pilots and around 46 are flight attendants, while 34 work in aircraft maintenance.

The airline expects to begin hiring shortly before the new building opens and will expand total jobs to about 300, with an average salary of more than \$34,000 a year. The plans were announced last year.

The new operation, on 10 acres on the west side of the airport off Crittenden Drive, will feature a hangar that will allow six planes to line up wingtip to wingtip and move in and out independently, Wilkinson said.

The hangar will be the first tenant of the 50-acre Louisville International Commerce Center, which officials hope will draw more airport-related businesses.



Kentucky Gov. Ernie Fletcher, left, and Chautauqua Airlines spokesman Warren Wilkinson attended an airport-grounds ceremony yesterday to hail the airline's plans for a new maintenance hangar in Louisville. (BY PAM SPAULDING, THE COURIER-JOURNAL)

QUICK TAKE

Last we knew

Chautauqua Airlines increased the size of its planned Louisville maintenance hub and moved it from a site east of the airport to the Louisville International Commerce Center west of the airfield.

The latest

Chautauqua is set to begin construction in the next few days and expects to complete the \$8.5 million operation in late December.

Why it's news

Chautauqua will increase its Louisville work force from 171 to 300, with an average salary of more than \$34,000 a year.

How to apply

Go to www.flychautauqua.com.



"Aviation is an industry where we have a lot of expertise in Louisville, and it's just plain smart to build upon what you're good at," said Steve Higdon, president of Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce. He noted Louisville's position as home of UPS Airlines.

Chautauqua, a subsidiary of Republic Airways Holdings, provides regional jet service for Delta Air Lines, United Airlines, US Airways and American Airlines. The Louisville maintenance operation will service planes for all except American and will be "a great home for our employees ... a facility that they can be proud to work in," Wilkinson said.

Anyone interested in a job with Chautauqua should apply through the company's Web site, www.flychautauqua.com, Wilkinson said.

In 2003 Louisville was chosen to be headquarters for a new regional airline, Republic Airlines, that would operate along with Chautauqua under the Republic Airways parent company. Those plans, which would have generated 355 jobs, were dropped because of delays in receiving Federal Aviation Administration certification for the airline. Republic Airways decided to place a Chautauqua maintenance operation in Louisville, saving most of the originally planned jobs.

The Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority approved up to \$7.8 million in tax incentives over 10 years for the Chautauqua operation.