

Making the move

Avionics experts relocate to Henderson airport

After nearly 40 years of operation at Evansville Dress Regional Airport, Ron Collins Aviation Electronics has relocated to the Henderson City-County Airport.

An area leader in avionics repair and custom installation work, Ron Collins Aviation Electronics specializes in the electronic inner-workings of both small and large aircraft, including corporate jets, according to Bruce Tippet, president and CEO of the company.

“We service and install everything from autopilots to radars to radios,” he said.

Tippet, and his three partners — Alan Gaisser, Rowan Jones and Ron Mattingly — bought the avionics company from its founder, Ron Collins, in 2007.

Collins created the business in 1969 and worked to transform it from a small local operation to a nationally and internationally known avionics company.

As the deal with Collins was being finalized, Tippet and his partners, who have more than 50 years of combined experience with the company, approached then-Henderson Mayor Henry Lackey about the possibility of relocating to Henderson.

“I have been a pilot for over 30 years,” Lackey said, “and Ron Collins Aviation has completed all of my work over the years. I just happened to have my plane over there when Bruce approached me.”

After talking to Tippet, Lackey contacted then-Airport Board Chairman Dick Wham.

“At first, it seemed too good to be true,” Wham said. “A business such as this is a real prize to have at any airport. The airport board put in long hours on this project, and this move is our reward.”

Tippet said Lackey and Wham, along with many other local community members and organizations, made the decision to move here quite simple.

“Henderson really rolled out the red carpet for us,” Tippet said. “We have received the support of both the city and county, as well as Ohio Valley Bank, Northwest Kentucky Forward and GRADD (Green River Area Development District).”

Tippet said Scott Miller, who is the present chairman of the Henderson City-County Airport board, has also been “very supportive as an advocate and a mentor.”

Miller, who is president and CEO of Scott Industries, said the addition of Ron Collins Aviation Electronics to the airport “provides an excellent opportunity to grow the airport commercially.”

“We are getting a lot more attention here now,” the chairman said.

Miller actually relocated Scott Aviation from its 10,000 square-foot hangar at the Henderson airport to provide room for the incoming business.

He said his company’s hangar was the best fit for Ron Collins Aviation Electronics.

The company officially moved to the Henderson airport during Memorial Day weekend of 2007, and Tippet said he has been very pleased with the transition.

“Sixty-five percent of our customers fly to us from more than 250 miles away, so we have not lost any customers,” Tippet said. “We have actually gained new customers.”

Tippet said he considers his avionics business “a gateway for the community.”

“People who wouldn’t come to Henderson for any other reason land their planes here for our services,” the CEO said, “and many of these people stay here while we are completing their work.”

This means new customers, and possibly even future residents, for Henderson County.

“Ron Collins Aviation brings wealthy people into our community,” Lackey said. “And we have a chance to sell Henderson to (these visitors). They can come and say, ‘Wow, this is a great place.’”

Lackey said growing businesses, such as Ron Collins Aviation Electronics, are very important to the local economy.

“As Ron Collins expands, they will be hiring new technicians,” he said. “What’s a \$60,000 job worth to Henderson?”

Lackey also said that many of these employees choose to live in Henderson, which is an added bonus to the community.

“When (employees) decide to live here, they spend their dollars here,” he said.

Tippett said he is excited about the new growth the company has been experiencing.

“We have recently hired three new employees and hope to add more as we continue to grow,” the CEO said. “We now have 11 full-time and two part-time employees.”

This workforce includes sheet-metal workers, installation and repair experts, sales staff and administration.

In all, the company filled about 2,600 orders in 2007, grossing almost \$1.5 million in sales and services for the year. Tippett said he projects this total to reach nearly \$2 million in 2008.

And as the company’s customer base continues to grow, its physical working space must grow, as well.

“We are in the process of building a 4,000 square-foot addition onto our current hangar,” Tippett said. “Our workshop alone will increase from 1,200 square feet to more than 4,000.”

Tippett added that this ability to expand was a major factor in the company’s decision to relocate here.

“Our hangar in Evansville was 40 to 50 years old,” he said. “And we had no more room to grow at that location.”

However, the Henderson City-County Airport offered the company ample room for its future growth.

The Henderson airport is also home to Don Davis Aviation, the airport’s fixed-based operator, which provides chartered flights, fuel sales and aircraft maintenance.

Tippett said his company and Don Davis Aviation are not in competition but rather enjoy a mutually-beneficial relationship.

“It’s a two-way street,” the CEO said. “We help each other. I refer fuel sales and maintenance work beyond avionics to Don Davis, and they refer any avionics work to me.”

Henderson Mayor Tom Davis said Ron Collins Aviation Electronics has helped put the Henderson airport on the map. “We have seen a major increase in usage here,” the mayor said. “They (Ron Collins Aviation) are busy as bees and are bringing in planes from all over the place.”

David added that the airport’s runway has recently been repaved in order to accommodate increasing air traffic to the area.

“We are really excited about Ron Collins being here,” the mayor said. “I think it’s a win-win for everyone involved.”

Henderson County Judge-Executive Sandy Watkins echoed the mayor’s compliments of Ron Collins and added that the company is “just the kind of economic development we like to see in our area.”

“It took the city, county, state and federal government working together to make this deal happen,” Watkins said. “I am so proud that Ron Collins saw Henderson as a good marketplace and place to call home.”

And indeed, the avionics company has found its home here.

“It was a good move for us, and it was a good move for Henderson,” Tippett said. “We just want to say ‘thank you’ to everyone involved in bringing us here.”

“We are here to stay,” he said.

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