

Projects at Illinois Valley Airport ‘thwarted’

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commissioners claim.

“We were working together fairly well,” Bleadon said. “I have no ill will toward the commissioners, but they made a mistake in disbanding the (airports) commission.”

There are larger issues preventing development of the county’s airports, Bleadon said. They include a lack of professional aviation expertise within county government.

“I think there’s a lack of understanding on how to run airports,” he said. “Because of that, mistakes are made.”

Ed Russell, who served on the county’s previous airport advisory board, said that the airport issue is complicated by “a series of things.” Like Bleadon, Russell’s experience is that county officials have been quick to ignore advice offered by advisory board members.

“It’s not these individual personalities or this particular circumstance,” Russell said. “It’s been a lack of government paying attention to citizen advisers with long-term expertise in this area (such as airports and aviation).”

He added that the lack of development at the 173-acre Illinois Valley Airport, former site of the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, is due to a slew of missed opportunities.

“There’s been a lease sitting on the desk,” he said. “There’s been a fuel station sitting on the desk.

“The money’s on the table, the pen is in hand, but nothing happens.”

Businesses that have expressed interest in leasing space at Illinois Valley Airport have encountered great difficulty when trying to do so, Russell said.

“Historically,” he continued, “people have wanted to have million-dollar businesses at the airport. But because of lack of response from the powers that be, they’ve gone elsewhere after years of wanting to be on this airport (site).”

Gary Buck spent nearly two decades fighting wild-fires from the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base, which evolved into the I.V. Airport. He currently serves as president of the nonprofit Siskiyou Smokejumper Base Museum Project.

Buck said that he disagrees with the county commission decision to dissolve the advisory board. He credits Bleadon, Bill Gettles and Kurt Krauss for their work

facilities, including a cafe.

“It just seems to me that the county commissioners and airport manager are doing everything they can to suppress development out here at the I.V. Airport,” Gettles said. “The Grants Pass Airport is doing leaps and bounds, as far as new development.

“Nothing like that happens over here. Every time someone wants to get something started, like leasing

‘I no longer consider the airport manager to be an advocate for me ... I consider him an adversary’
- Jack McCornack

with that body.

“They were there for the community and volunteered their time,” Buck said. “All three are very qualified, and the commission shouldn’t have been disbanded. They did a great job.”

He stated that his attempts with other volunteers to establish a smokejumper museum have become unnecessarily complicated.

“It feels like a ‘good old boy’ system,” he said. “If you stay in touch with the right people, you might get what you want. But if you’re not on the good list, you’re in trouble.”

Buck said that he has been trying to obtain a lease to set up the former smokejumper base -- now on the National Register of Historic Places -- as a cultural heritage tourism attraction. However, many of the parking spots at I.V. Airport have been eliminated.

“There would be overflow parking to accommodate at least 100 cars, and it was taken away two years ago,” Buck said. “We’d like to bring school buses and tour buses to the smokejumper museum, but we can’t if there’s no place to park.”

Gettles, who operates a business at I.V. Airport, shares Buck’s disappointment with what many see as continued underutilization of the I.V. Airport and its

ground to a new tenant to build a hangar, it takes forever.”

Jack McCornack, a veteran in the aviation industry, certainly agrees. On May 9, the county commissioners approved a lease renewal for McCornack’s business, McSquared Design, which operates from I.V. Airport.

McCornack described the process as an “uphill battle” lasting 14 months. He said that Alex Grossi, the county’s airports manager, was less than helpful during that time.

“I don’t consider it an ideal tenant-land owner relationship,” McCornack said. “It’s to the point now where as a tenant and user of the I.V. Airport, I no longer consider the airport manager to be an advocate for me. I consider him an adversary.”

Grossi said that he was not involved in the county commission’s decision to dissolve the advisory board, but that it hasn’t affected operations at either of the county’s airports.

“There’s no real change,” Grossi said. “I rely on airport users to have suggestions and input, and that really hasn’t changed any. I still rely on people whether there’s a committee or not.”

Grossi said that elimination of some parking spaces at I.V. Airport was done in compliance of Federal Aviation Administration regula-

Selma’s Calhoun on European equestrian program

Chelsea Calhoun, of Selma, is one of four students representing her college and the United States in Europe by conducting American Quarter Horse Association Clinics in three countries.

Chelsea is a graduate of St. Mary’s High School in Medford, and an Oregon High School Equestrian Teams (OHSET) alumna. She attends the University of Findley (UF) in Ohio. A senior, she will graduate in 2008 with degrees in equine science and early childhood education.

Upon returning from the



Chelsea Calhoun

European clinics, Chelsea

will join the staff at UF to welcome incoming classes, and teach in the equine program on an internship with the college.

UF recently was one of a handful of universities to receive a grant from the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) enabling four UF equestrian students to participate in AQHA’s International Clinic Program throughout Europe.

Students left Findlay July 7 and will re-

tions. He added that there are other areas that could be used for that purpose in the future.

“We do have an area that is large enough to accommodate twice the number of parking places than we currently have at the (I.V.) airport,” Grossi observed. “That shouldn’t be an issue.

“I don’t understand why they were upset about spaces that were 180 feet from the runway. It was pretty obviously a hazardous situation.”

Commissioner Dave Toler, an Illinois Valley resident, said that he would support formation of a completely independent airport advisory group.

“I would encourage an organization that would be more independent of the airport supervisor and have a little more direct connection with the board,” Toler said. “That’s what I hope will fill that void.”

Members of the past boards were appointed by the commissioners, Toler said, which has caused some politicization.

“Maybe part of the problem has been that they serve at the will of the board,” Toler said. “Maybe what I’m suggesting will break from that completely.”

Grossi said that he has a definitive long-term vision for the future of I.V. Airport.

“The airport itself is going to be playing a much greater role in the future for the valley for medical flights and freight flights,” he avowed. “That’s the direction I’ve been pointed in for the last five or six years.” he asserted.

For now, Grossi maintains, he will continue to send regular maintenance personnel to the site to keep it operational for its existing tenants.

“I haven’t been neglecting the I.V. Airport,” Grossi said. “We still have the airport, and we still have requirements to keep it air worthy.”

turn Aug. 2. The four-day clinics are being held in Germany, Norway and Sweden, and are organized by the host country’s quarter horse association. UF students are sharing training techniques and demonstrating principles they have been taught at the university.

Interpreters are onsite to help the students communicate with their international audiences.

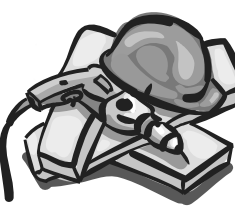
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