

Central Oregon attractive for new airlines

By SUZANNE ROIG
The Bulletin



Submitted photo

The airline Avelo began direct flights from Burbank, California, to Redmond in May. It's not the only smaller airline that sees potential in Central Oregon.

rated resort areas like Tetherow, Eagle Crest, Pronghorn, Black Butte Ranch and Sunriver — collected \$11.5 million in transient room taxes, a 51.9% increase over the previous year. In Bend, the transient room tax collection for fiscal year 2021 was \$11.1 million, a 26.2% increase from the previous year.

Deschutes County collects an 8% transient room tax and Bend collects a 10.4% lodging tax for each night.

“What we’re seeing because of the pandemic and COVID-19 is there’s been a shift by smaller, boutique airlines to move into the Western outdoor market,” said Zach Bass, Redmond Airport director.

This past summer Redmond saw about as many passengers as it did before March 2020 when the pandemic caused the closure of businesses and travel as a way to curb the spread of the virus. In July 2019, 102,000 passengers passed through the airport, compared to July 2020 when a mere 37,000 came through. This July, however, there were 105,000 passengers in the Redmond Airport, Bass said.

There are seven airlines providing about 25 flights a day out of Redmond, Bass said. The number of flights tends to fluctuate depending on time of year. Carriers include Alaska Air, Ameri-

can Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Allegiant Airlines, Boutique Air, United Airlines and Avelo. Bass said the airport is working with American to see if it will operate direct flights from Redmond to Dallas that could start this spring.

Travis Christ, Avelo Airlines head of marketing, said that since May, the direct flights from Redmond to Burbank, California, three times a week have done well for the newcomer. The airline, which also launched flights in Medford and Eugene, has made a business plan out of flying from non-hub airports near large cities to popular visitor destinations, like Bend, Christ said.

Avelo uses 189-seat Boeing 737-800 aircraft out of Redmond, one of 17 destinations the airline offers across the Western United States. Additional destinations are being added. Fort Collins, Colorado, is being added this week and will go from New Haven, Connecticut to multiple destinations in Florida come November.

Launching a new airline isn’t easy, but it wasn’t nearly as difficult as Avelo anticipated. Pent up travel demand among visitors spurred travel in the United States since many international locations were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, Christ said.

“We’re the new way to Los Angeles,” Christ said in an interview. “Peo-

ple are eager to get out of the big, congested airports, with expensive parking and crowds.

“We want to serve these areas that have been underserved, and it was good fortune for us that a lot of the bigger city folks moved to these other areas, causing an influx of in-migration.”

The city of Redmond did offer Avelo \$25,000 in marketing support, matching money the airline is spending to drum up interest among travelers.

Also starting in November is aha! by ExpressJet Airlines, the airline’s hotel and air leisure brand, that offers nonstop flights from the Reno-Tahoe to Redmond. The three-times-a-week direct flights avoid layovers and crowds. Choosing to fly to Redmond was easy as the destinations are similar, said Tim Sieber, head of aha! ExpressJet Airlines business unit.

Both destinations focus on outdoor activities. Both destinations have disposable income. Both destinations have a robust food and beer scene.

“It made sense to link the two destinations by an airplane,” Sieber said. “The two destinations are very similar, and the direct flight provides an opportunity to exchange people between two markets that share a lot of the same interests.”

With an eye on the travel data, ExpressJet said it recognized that Reno-Tahoe had a lot of visitors from Bend and Redmond who had to either drive or make a connection in Portland, Sieber said.

“We see an opportunity for providing direct flights that avoid time in airports and the potential exposure to COVID-19,” Sieber said. “We think people want that and they want to go to less crowded places for activities. Clearly there’s a lot of pent-up demand for short trips.”

OSU lands \$10M for hemp research

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — Oregon State University’s Global Hemp Innovation Center has received a \$10 million USDA grant to study how and where the versatile crop can support rural economies across four Western states.

The five-year project was one of 15 proposals to receive funding from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which awarded \$146 million for sustainable agricultural research.

OSU established the Global Hemp Innovation Center in 2019 — one year after hemp was decriminalized in the 2018 Farm Bill — to provide scientific data necessary for spurring investment in the nascent industry.

The center combines more than 40 OSU faculty in 19 academic disciplines to research all aspects of hemp, from cultivation to end products.

Jeff Steiner, associate director of the center, described hemp as being locked away in a time capsule for more than 80 years after it was banned in the U.S. It is the center’s job to find out how hemp can be incorporated into modern agricultural practices and production systems.

That in turn helps to drive new markets for the crop, including essential oils, grain and fiber. “While enthusiasm for hemp has grown, there is still a tremendous lack of knowledge about the crop,” Steiner said.

For this project, OSU is partnering with eight other institutions to match hemp genetics and best agricultural practices with growing areas east of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada in Oregon, Washington, California and Nevada.

It all starts with the plant, Steiner said. Hemp grown primarily for oil extraction is not genetically the same as hemp grown for grain or fiber. Optimum growing conditions for one type may not be suitable for another.

What’s more, Steiner said hemp must fit into local agricultural systems and crop rotations so it does not displace other commodities, such as hay and potatoes in the Klamath Basin.

“It’s not like we have to start from scratch, but we have to apply all this knowledge and make it work for hemp,” Steiner said.

Researchers are also looking at where to add processing capacity for hemp, and whether those facilities can be built in rural and tribal communities.

Tribal partners include the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in Central Oregon, which has taken a keen interest in hemp to boost economic development.

“The Warm Springs Tribe has interest in exploring and expanding our agricultural opportunities in hemp production, and this is one avenue to achieve this,” said Laurie Danzuka, cannabis project coordinator for the tribe.

Danzuka said the collaboration will allow tribal farmers to identify potential suitable uses for hemp and utilize best farming practices for its production.

Steiner said the up-front participation of tribes and other rural communities in the project is critical to their success.

“The potential economic opportunities this new commodity may have presents tremendous potential for rural communities, and our project has set out to ensure those opportunities are equally available and relevant to all kinds of farmers,” Steiner said.

He pointed to studies indicating the global industrial hemp market could reach \$36 billion by 2026. Part of that relies on hemp’s ability to tap into other markets, such as the nutraceutical industry and the textile business.

“It’s a matter of finding how hemp can be more economical than existing products in those sectors,” Steiner said. “There’s a huge potential for where this can be fit in.”

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SKID SMARTS
Learn how to handle your car BEFORE you go into a skid.

BE PREPARED
Road delays happen. Put together & carry a road trip safety kit.

SKID 101
Winter driving classes are a great idea.

HAVE PATIENCE
Be willing to wait for better road conditions.

SHOULDER SAFETY
If you pull over, get as far on the shoulder as possible, turn off headlights & turn on hazards.

DON'T CRUISE CONTROL
Your tires may spin too fast on slick roads, causing you to lose control.

BE SEEN
Turn on your low-beam headlights even during the day.

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