

BKV airport welcomes a new Fixed Base Operator

Spring Hill
Thursday, March 21, 2024

Hernando Sun
By: Lisa McNeil



Hernando County welcomes a new Fixed Base Operator (FBO) to the Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport (BKV). Bluewater Aviation will operate 17 private, corporate, and executive hangars and open a runway-side restaurant on 12.8 acres on Helicopter Drive on the east side of runway 9-27. The complex will be located on the northeast side of the airport, just south of Spring Hill Drive. The restaurant will be open to the public. The complex will also contain community hangars.

The company is the second FBO on the campus. American Aviation has been the only FBO for many years. An FBO is an organization that has been granted permission to provide services to the general aviation community of an airport. Services include fueling, parking, and hangar space.

There are minimum operating standards (MOS) the business must meet in order to be designated an FBO. The MOS was last updated in 2016 and includes the requirement of 10 contiguous acres, 20,000 square feet of hangar space, 90,000 square feet of paved ramp to accommodate planes with a 79' wingspan, 2000 square feet of office space, and retail fuel sales.

A number of companies have tried unsuccessfully to become fixed base operators at Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport over the years.

Anthony Santarsiero and Cristi Cola of Bluewater Aviation presented their vision for the complex. Santarsiero obtained his Private Pilot license at BKV. "It's a little bit of coming home for me."

His vision for the FBO is inspired by the Ocala Airport, "The facility they just built up there is second to none, and it's redefined that airport. I think the Brooksville Airport is ready for the same."

Santarsiero estimates the project to cost roughly \$10 – \$12 million dollars and take three to five years to complete. Groundbreaking is planned for December 31, 2023. Bluewater intends to employ 35 people at this location.

The lease agreement begins on September 1, 2023, and ends after 50 years. After 15 years, if Bluewater invests in capital improvement projects, they will be entitled to one additional year on

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the lease term for every \$100,000 invested, up to a maximum of 10 years.
The airport will recognize a minimum annual revenue of \$55,669 from this lease.

According to the lease agreement, the Lessee shall submit a development plan to the county no more than three months after the lease's effective date. The lessee shall begin construction of the improvements no later than 12 months after the effective date and shall obtain a certificate of occupancy no more than 24 months after the effective date.

The lease states that the agreement does not prohibit the Lessee from seeking to amend certain minimum operating standards requirements. Exhibit 2 of the lease lays out the phases of construction. Phase 1 will be dedicated to Commercial/ General Aviation Aircraft Storage and Maintenance, which includes various-sized hangars for commercial storage, office and storage areas, paved transit / tie-down area, fuel storage to support fuel services (a requirement to receive the Certificate of Occupancy) and a temporary FBO office structure. Phase 2 and beyond include the construction of a permanent FBO building "with the right to build a restaurant/food service area."

The addition of a second FBO at the airport comes at a time of increased aviation activity at the airport. According to a presentation by airport manager Steven Miller in March, "In 2023, BKV was upgraded to National from Regional by the FAA based on a very high level of aviation activity, particularly by jets and multi-engine aircraft." Classifications of general aviation airports are National, Regional, Local, and Basic. In 2022, the airport experienced 4.2 percent growth in calendar year traffic, which was record growth for the airport. As a National Airport, BKV received \$844,000 in funding from the Federal Aviation Administration through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Bluewater Aviation joins the following aviation-based businesses and organizations at the airport: FBO American Aviation, Sentinel Services Group (flight training, aircraft rental, and 100LL self-fuel service), Flightpath Aviation Services (aircraft maintenance), Jet Concepts (aircraft maintenance, management, parts sales), Med-TransFlorida (EMS Helicopter Response), HCSO Aviation Unit, GlobalJetCare (air ambulance services), Pem-Air (FAA and EASA certified global repair provider of gas turbine engines), American Aviation Flight Academy, the U.S. Army Florida Air National Guard Aviation Support Unit #2 (the 13-acre complex is home to 10 Black Hawk helicopters and typically employs 45 people), Civil Air Patrol, and the Experimental Aircraft Association.

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