**SKY THE LIMIT FOR PTI?**

Leveraging our booming airport to improve our community

Keith G. Debbage is a professor in the Department of Geography, Environment and Sustainability at UNCG. Contact him at kgdebbag@uncg.edu or visit www.eng.uncg.edu/kgdebbag.

**Ideas to use the Pantone color of the year in your home.**

Very Peri

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**INTERSTATE 73/NC 158**

the landscape in the 100 wineries that dot the Triad. Tastings in New target for outrage

On Good Friday, April 12, 1963, an open letter appeared in the Birmingham News, signed by eight prominent clergy. It was a courageously powerful statement.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL (1845)

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with error:
For right is right, quite apart from might.

For the good or evil with which
The world is filled, we must, at all events,
Choose either to be free or unfree.

For we are confronted by a series
Of critical approaches to racial problems.

Gwen Fiske-Fallik is communications director with Downtown Winston-Salem and a Record columnist.

**New target for outrage**

WENSY FLAGG-HEINZ Show & Share

When the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in North Carolina, my family was thrown into a state of uncertainty. I was concerned for my parents, who were leaving for a day trip away. I was nervous for my son, who was starting his first day of a full state school. I was worried for my friends, who would feel the pressure of isolation in grocery stores. I was nervous for growing short of remarkable. Much of it is a result of thoughtful long-range planning by the Airport Authority, which has patiently acquired 1,000 acres around the airport over the years and successfully attracted world-class clients like FedEx, HondaJet, HAECO Americas and must recently Boom Supersonic. The real result is that PTI Airport has become an economic engine, generating $9 billion in economic impact per year according to our Economic Impact analysis. According to some observers, our airport new generates more jobs than any airport in the state based on those working at companies on the airfield, but not including airport staff. Within the airport, services are announced, that jobs figure will be boosted to more than 12,000 given PTI’s current level of about 8,600 workers. Even better, most of these jobs pay top dollar with, for example, Boom Supersonic’s expected to offer an average annual wage of about $100,000. Lingerings questions Despite all the good news, now is not a time for complacency. As an editorial board member of the Journal of Air Transportation Management, I get to interact with airline analysts from around the world. What they tell me is that Boom’s plans to build a carbon-neutral supersonic jet that will use 100% biomass fuel is largely grounded in unproven technology at this point. That may not necessitate a Meeraboo shrinking block, but it is likely that the road to Federal Aviation Administration approval for the Boom airplane will be very lengthy. Even if the company itself does not expect to carry paying passengers until 2029 at the earliest. Furthermore, the Boom facility is located to only require 60 acres of land, so the Airport Authority has lots of additional space.

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**Call for moderation wilts in the glare of hindsight**

Richard Brown is a former reporter and editor who lives in Winston-Salem.

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land that still needs filling with prospective new clients.

Finally, the firm executives whom the Airport Authority can leverage to attract the firms that would actually use airport facilities — that rules out, for example, a prospective distribution center or automobile manufacturer on airport land.

Looking ahead

The question then becomes what’s next. How can we best leverage our booming airport moving forward?

Over the past two years, I have been working with InterVISTAS — an international airline consulting firm — on a grant funded by the National Academies of Sciences/Transportation Research Board that is focused on measuring the effects of changes in air service connectivity on regional economic development. The final report and website could make Minneapolis-St. Paul the first airport to be featured and featured in the Triad because of one of our 14 national case studies in our very own PTI Airport.

What we learned in this research is that for airports to succeed, they typically need a surrounding metropolitan economy capable of sustaining a working population with high propositions to fly. One of the reasons both Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham have been passenger service than PTI is because their regional economies are largely grounded in banking and technology, respectively. Both these sectors of the economy tend to generate workers who travel regularly and need a lot of face-to-face meetings (at least before the COVID pandemic).

Beyond passengers, air cargo can also be critical for local businesses. Air cargo firms that specialize in perishable goods (e.g., cut flowers, pharmaceuticals), high-value goods (e.g., electronics, medical devices) or time-sensitive goods (e.g., just-in-time manufacturing processes, replacement parts) can all help to nurture local airport operations.

The research with InterVISTAS also outlines strategies for both airport authorities and local economic development leaders to consider when trying to attract airport-related economic connections. A key step in this process is developing updated, broad-based airport master plans that support zoning policies that hold back land for firms capable of supporting airport operations while at the same time protecting existing residential neighborhoods. As Boeing Supersonic — and the recently announced Toyota electric and hybrid car battery plant to be built in northern Georgia — consume collectively hundreds of well-paid workers, could that become a key tipping point for the Triad?

Could we begin to evolve into a regional economic capable of attracting more high-end companies onto Airport Authority land while at the same time attracting the sort of firms off-site that will build more demand for passenger services at the airport?

In time, we’ll find out, but recent developments suggest that if we play our cards right and think long-term, it is possible that our region will continue to fly high.