

## **New Airport Improvements**

Millinocket Municipal Airport important asset in economic development efforts

By Shelley Farrington

MILLINOCKET – The Millinocket Community Airport was cut out of the northern forest in 1938 as a necessity for the newly burgeoning air transportation industry and the military. The Civilian Conservation Corp built it and a stone and plaque commemorating the location of its camp can be found outside the airport fence.

That first mission of service has been a hallmark of the now Millinocket Municipal Airport and continues as the region is seeing growth and the hopeful beginning of an economic turnaround. MMA Manager Jeff Campbell is relying on his more than 20 years of experience and that of his two experienced part-time employees to guide the airport into its next era of service.

With talks of removing the airport from the town's public works department ongoing and establishing it as its own entity, the Millinocket Town Council is paving the way for the airport to grow. Federal COVID relief money, Federal Aviation Administration grant money for new snow removal equipment and a grant for the engineering study for a new terminal building are recent examples of that growth.

Campbell believes the original specification of the airport and its location in the middle of the woods in the middle of the state continues to be assets to the region. He said the field was originally designed as an "overrun" and "feeder" field for the military so the two runways were long – 100 feet wide by 5,000 feet. Later on modifications were made to the main runway making it 100 by 4,700 and the second runway 100 by 4000 feet.

While working at the airport, as a contracted employee, then public works employee and finally as airport manager, Campbell has shared his love for flying, his hometown and his desire to make MMA an integral part of the success of the region. With a budget of \$167,000 and revenues of over \$100,000 the airport may be the biggest bargain in the region.

"I've been coming here since I was a kid," Campbell said, "one of my favorite memories is coming here when I was nine years old and I saw my father get his first airplane - I saw it fly right in. It's my dream job, running my hometown airport."

He clearly loves what he does and takes pride in the amenities offered by the almost 180 acres airport and the opportunities it offers for the future. The airport is home to West Branch Aviation, Jump and Raft - a seasonal skydiving business, Noyes Enterprises - an airplane restoration business and sells jet fuel and other pilot supplies. The main office offers a break room with vending machines, microwaves and coffeemakers and Campbell offers good conversations and speaks about the history of the airport.

There has been talk of luring passenger flights back to Millinocket restoring the service that was first offered by Northeast Airlines in the 1950's. The new terminal building that is in the concept stages has an area where an airline could locate and process passengers.

Campbell, who is a private pilot, invites anyone who wants to learn more about the airport or local air travel history to come by and visit. The airport is open from 8 am to 4 p.m. seven days a week during the summer and Monday through Friday during the winter months. More information can be found on the airport website at [www.millinocket.org](http://www.millinocket.org) ; email at [airport@millinocket.org](mailto:airport@millinocket.org) or call 723-6649 or Campbell's cell at 731-9906.

Campbell is working to keep the ties between the airport and the community relevant and fun with its annual fly-in and car show every Columbus Day weekend. The barbeque during the event is run by the Millinocket Fire Department for its Pioneer Hose Company's scholarships. The airport has also hosted very successful truck pulls. Campbell said he hopes to host those events again as events come back from the pandemic.

Millinocket Town Council Chairman Steve Golieb said the MMA is an asset that's extremely important to the economic development of the region. He said the region is landlocked and the option of the airport is very attractive to potential business owners/developers as they look for this kind of executive amenity. Golieb said the length of the runway and the availability of jet fuel make the airport in the middle of the woods attractive to jets and small planes alike

"When it comes to the multimillion dollar development of the mill site, having an executive amenity like an airport can't be understated," Golieb said. "We have the airport, we have that asset, we need to support it."

On the flip side, Golieb said he knows of a Maine Department of Transportation employee who lives in Presque Isle but is currently working in the region and he flies his small plane here every day for work. He said there are many stories like that that show the value of the airport to a wide range of patrons.

Campbell said the recent announcement by Our Katahdin and Nautilus Data Technologies regarding the \$300 million data center investment is a great example of the value the airport brings to the region. He said Nautilus officials met with him before the announcement to see what the airport could offer them and they liked what they saw. Campbell said he's spoken with OK President Sean DeWitt on numerous occasions to see how each can help each other.

There are a bunch of pictures and memorabilia in the airport office all telling different stories of the airport and the region. Campbell loves to collect memorabilia and hear stories and he'd love to add to the collection. He said anyone with airport items are welcomed to share them as he'd love to see them and/or add them to the collection. Campbell said he hopes to create a display in the new terminal when it's built and there will be plenty of space for new history to be recorded.