

PGD's passenger count is business as usual

By **LIZ HARDAWAY**

STAFF WRITER

Punta Gorda **Airport** was visited by 34,000 fewer people this month.

Usually a 20 percent drop in business would set off major red flags, but no need to sound the alarm. Despite concerns that red tide might be affecting tourism, **airport** officials say this downturn is typical for travel patterns in Florida. With less business in August and September, airlines schedule their major aircraft maintenance so they're in tip-top shape come holiday season.

"Our **airport** and passenger traffic has not been impacted by red tide," Miller said.

With kids going back to school, "travel patterns usually drop off," said **airport** spokesperson Kaley Miller.

"As the weather starts to cool off in northern states, residents are more likely to come back to Florida starting in October."

Passenger counts at PGD have consistently peaked during March, July and December since 2015.

PGD's passenger count actually exceeded 1 million passengers earlier than it ever has, according to passenger count records. This year, the **airport** reached 1 million passengers in July, whereas in 2017 it took until October, and November in 2016. The year before, 2015, didn't even reach 1 million passengers, totaling 836,472 by the end of the year.

In fact, Allegiant Travel Co. was ranked the number one airline to invest in, according to Bank of America analyst Andrew Didora in a recent U.S. News report released Tuesday. Didora cited Allegiant's transition

to an all-Airbus fleet as a contributor to the company's predicted long-term

success.

Email: lhardaway@sun-herald.com



Passengers board an early morning Allegiant Airlines flight at Punta Gorda airport.

SUN PHOTO BY TOM O'NEILL

Air-traffic control found at fault for Punta Gorda Airport mishap 2 years ago

By WINK NEWS

Two years ago a small airplane was blown off the runway during an attempt to land at the Punta Gorda **Airport**. A report just released by the National Transportation Safety Board says the air traffic controller was at fault for the mishap.

According to reports, the Allegiant plane was performing engine tests on the runway as the small plane landed.

A sudden gust of air from the Allegiant plane's test blew the smaller plane off the runway into the grass, causing damages to the plane.

No one was injured, but the **airport** agreed to update their traffic control policy, which bans planes from doing any testing that would cause thrusting toward an active runway.

Allegiant Travel Company is the only major commercial carrier currently operating at Punta Gorda **Airport**.

Charlotte County Airport Authority discusses Allegiant president's comment

By **LIZ HARDAWAY**

STAFF WRITER

Charlotte County **Airport** Authority board members took issue at the end of Thursday's monthly meeting with a recent comment by Allegiant Travel Company President John Redmond.

The comment, which was "we might as well change the name of the **airport** because it really is ours," was made by Redmond during Allegiant's annual Investor Day presentation. During that presentation, company executives told investors about the growth of the company and details concerning the upcoming development of the planned Sunseeker Resort in Charlotte Harbor.

"We were very frustrated about Mr.

Redmond's remark," said Punta Gorda **Airport** (PGD) CEO James Parish. "I'd write it off as the exuberance of an investor call," said **Airport** Authority Attorney Darol Carr. "I'm not making excuses, I'm just saying it was made during an investor call relative to Sunseeker, so if you put it into the context of where it was said, it wasn't a challenge to you."

At minute 37 of the Investor Day 2018 webcast, Redmond references slide 26 of the presentation, a photo showing seven Allegiant planes lined up at PGD.

He goes on to say: "So this is a great slide, I love this picture because it really communicates

you pull up to the front door, we might as well change the name of the **airport** because it really is ours."

Redmond continues to discuss how the **airport**'s passenger and destination count has improved since 2013, moving from 20 to 44 destinations, and anticipating the passenger count to get up to 2.2 million range and the number of cities expanding to 60 in the future.

"So very impressive and of course, even as impressive is when we've entered a market, it's been 100 percent stimulated by us. So the growth hasn't been — it's been 100 percent incremental due to us," Redmond said.

With an initial suggestion of drafting a letter from the board to Allegiant, the board decided to proceed privately with the comment.

The board also approved, in a split 3-2 vote, a resolution to increase the passenger facility charges from \$2 to \$4.50 per passenger.

Commission Chair James Herston, Vice-Chair Robert Hancik and commissioner Paul Andrews voted for the resolution while commissioners Kathleen Coppola and Pam Seay voted no.

"It can really add up," said Coppola. "I feel bad for the families."

The **airport**'s goal is to make the change by January 2019, according to PGD spokesperson Kaley Miller.

Each commissioner granted Parish above a 4.5 — except for Hancik, who gave Parish a 3.7 and did not grade Parish on specific criteria, but instead just gave him an overall score. "I've never seen (Parish's) goals and objectives defined," said Hancik, who wanted perceived gray areas of the evaluation to be defined. "This **airport** has changed dramatically and it's all for the better," Seay said. "That's not just because we have an airline here, it's because we have tremendous leadership."

The board also adopted a 2018-2019 budget. This year's budget will be \$42.5 million whereas the 2017-2018 budget was \$25.3 million.

The regular October monthly meeting for Charlotte County's **Airport** Authority is cancelled this year due to the Florida International Air Show, which is scheduled Oct. 19-21. The next meeting is planned Nov. 15 at 9 a.m. at the Charlotte County **Airport** Authority Board Room, located at 7375 Utilities Road, Building 313.

E-mail: lhardaway@sun-herald.com

Allegiant Travel Company aircraft are parked at Punta Gorda Airport. Allegiant President John Redmond noted in a recent Investor Day presentation from the company "how dominant Allegiant is in Punta Gorda."

John Redmond, president of Allegiant

just how dominant Allegiant is at Punta Gorda. You see seven aircrafts on the tarmac, we actually have nine there; can't fit it all in this small vignette of a picture, but it's impressive. When

Parish's annual evaluation was also discussed, the board granted him an average score of 4.6 out of 5.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

Air Show 2018 cleared for takeoff

Event comes to Punta Gorda Airport Oct. 19-21

By **LIZ HARDAWAY**

STAFF WRITER

A Lamborghini, a Ferrari and a jet meet on a runway. Who will make it to the finish line first?

Florida's 2018 International Air Show is testing to see which vehicle comes out victorious in one of its exhibits this year. Spectators will also see metal phoenixes, with plane's wings bursting out fireworks from the tips, and a Ford 650 truck that is propelled by three jet engines.

With more than 700 volunteers and over 20 sponsors, the event is celebrating its 37th anniversary. Not only does the air show showcase the local **airport**, but it also had an attendance of over 35,000 people last year, according to the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor and Convention Bureau. A quarter of those were Charlotte County residents; and 63 percent were day-trippers who generated 1,100 room nights in area paid accommodations. "It's nice this community event has turned into a regional event," said the air show's president, Dana Carr.

On Saturday and Sunday night, the air show will be hosting an after party so thousands of cars won't be stuck in the parking lot afterwards. "The goal is to have people relax," said Steve

Lineberry, who is in charge of the media and marketing for the event. The party will be held at the Tiki Hut manned by the Parrot Head, Lineberry said, and music will be provided by Tiki Tom & L.A, a local musical duo that promises "happy tunes" and "happy times."

"Come on over and party with us," Lineberry said.

Even before the excitement starts, visitors will have a chance Saturday and Sunday between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. to tour the planes, meet with the crew and talk with the pilots — subject to availability. Events and shows will start at noon. On Friday, the gate opens at 5 p.m. and performances start at 5:30 p.m.

Meanwhile, the team has established 20 acres of parking next to the grounds. Once parked, air-conditioned buses will take visitors to the main gate of the event. After security check-in, golf cart trams will shuttle visitors around air show grounds, stopping at "convenient hop-on, hop-off stops," Lineberry said. Aside from providing entertainment and generating millions to Charlotte County — \$4.2 million last year — the air show is also known for giving much of its proceeds to charity. In its 36 years of operation, the airshow has donated \$2.3 million to charities, Lineberry said. The event also allows children in

the Make A Wish Foundation to have a private viewing of the show from the VIP tent the day before the event, when pilots do their practice run.

Sponsors of the event include but aren't limited to Seminole Casino Hotel, Centennial Bank, the Punta Gorda **Airport**, Allegiant, Sunseeker Guide and Sunseeker Resort, which made in-kind donations to the event through advertisements.

The Florida International Air Show will take place at the Punta Gorda **Airport** Oct. 19-21. Tickets can be purchased at www.floridaairshow.com. For more information, call 833-743-3427.

Email: lhardaway@sun-herald.com

Steve Lineberry (left) and Dana Carr tell members of the press last week about the various acts that will be present at the air show.

A 1942 Vultee BT-15 plane owned by Tom Smith was on display while announcers discussed details to this year's Florida International Air Show last week.

SUN PHOTOS BY LIZ HARDAWAY//

Celebrating 40 million passengers

Allegiant refunds full flight departing from Punta Gorda

By LIZ HARDAWAY

STAFF WRITER

Nearly 150 Allegiant passengers sat at their gate Thursday morning at Punta Gorda **Airport**.

After mustering the energy to make their 9 a.m. flight, the passengers sat, waiting

to board, as some glanced at their boarding passes for flight 1305 to Cincinnati. Some were traveling for a wedding, for example, others to see relatives.

A lone sign next to a table full of untouched mini-cupcakes, muffins, drink koozies and balloons, stated the big news: “40 million to Florida flight refund.”

“I saw the balloons and stuff over there and thought something’s going on,” said Cindy Breen, not knowing that a flight refund would be granted to her family.

Then Allegiant’s director of public relations, Kim

Schaefer, took the microphone, and after a few interruptions from mandatory flight announcements, told the 146 passengers about to board flight 1305 that their flights were free.

In celebration of Allegiant having 40 million passengers fly through Florida, “each and every one of you, your full round trip airfare, seats, bags, are all being refunded,” Schaefer said.

Applause erupted from the passengers. Early morning, groggy, sluggish energy transformed almost instantly to glee.

“Everybody’s smiling,

they’re sending text messages to their

“Congratulations to Allegiant on this milestone and to our PGD passengers receiving this special refund,” Punta Gorda Airport CEO James Parish said during the celebration.

SUN PHOTO BY LIZ HARDAWAY

family and friends...it’s just as cute as can be,” said **Airport** Authority commissioner Pam Seay. “That kind of generosity is unexpected from a major company.”

Allegiant announced in May it hit the 80 million passenger mark, with almost half of all their passengers flying into or out of Florida.

“Allegiant is acknowledging that if it weren’t for the passengers coming in and out of this area, they wouldn’t be where they are right now,” Seay said.

“I guess we’ll just pass those savings along,” said Cindy Breen.

“For us to be able to share this with Allegiant and share this with all of the passengers, it feels great,” Seay said.

Mark and Lesly Litteral, and Lesly’s mother Karen Rogers, drove from Naples to take this flight to a wedding as well. After checking bags that morning, Mark Litteral estimated the family saved \$600.

affordable travel opportunities,” said PGD CEO James Parish in a press release.

With the average one-way trip for Allegiant flights out of Punta Gorda costing \$72, flight 1305 passengers saved an estimated total of \$10,512. This estimate does not include the savings on checked bags, nor the return trip.

PGD passengers weren’t the only ones who got free flights. The same freebie was given to a flight in each Allegiant **airport** in Florida. This

SUN PHOTO BY LIZ HARDAWAY

(From left to right) Lesly and Mark Litteral and Lesly’s mother, Karen Rogers, think they should try their luck next in Las Vegas.

SUN PHOTO BY LIZ HARDAWAY

A sign announcing to passengers that Allegiant was giving away flight refunds to celebrate 40

Since 2009, more than 5.5 million people have traveled through Punta Gorda **Airport** through Allegiant.

Cindy Breen and her husband, Barry Breen, were flying to Cincinnati for her son's wedding. "(He) gave us 38 days to tell us he was getting married," Barry Breen said. Now the couple estimated they saved \$300.

"It's absolutely a shock," Lesly Litteral said. "I haven't flown another airline in forever," citing the convenience and pricing as her reasons for using the airline.

"We're going to Las Vegas," Lesly Litteral laughed. "We're on a lucky streak."

"This shows Allegiant's commitment to its business growth in Florida — which has fueled our tourism economy and increased

includes Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Orlando-Sanford, Sarasota-Bradenton and Tampa-St. Pete.

Email: lhardaway@sun-herald.com

Barry (left) and Cindy Breen (right) celebrate their free flight while waiting to board the flight to Cincinnati.

million passengers who have flown through Florida.

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