

## Air traffic control tower goes above and beyond

Punta Gorda Airport receives RVA award

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**PUNTA GORDA** — The air traffic control tower at the Punta Gorda Airport was chosen as the southeast and southern United States 2022 Facility of the Year award out of 102 eligible airports.

This is the team's second time winning in three years.

Stephen Smith, vice president of Robinson Aviation's FAA Contract Tower Program (FCT), and RVA President Keren Mclendon presented the award to Air Traffic Control Manager George Harper. "Every year we try to recognize the outstanding facility and outstanding control room from the year before," Smith said. "Today, we're recognizing the 2022 year."

Smith said managers can nominate their facilities/control room.

An internal evaluation is also assessed through write-ups and survey scores from the User Satisfaction Survey. "We make the recommendation that goes through myself and Keren," he said.

Mclendon added that the RVA has 103 FAA contracted facilities within the company, yet Punta Gorda has won twice in three years — a difficult achievement to accomplish, according to Harper.

"Everyone in this room has displayed teamwork and working together because without them receiving it, you just can't do it with you all," Smith said. "It's great teamwork and shows a lot of what you're doing, so thank you very much."

On Smith's recommendation form, the Punta Gorda Air Traffic Control Tower received a perfect score (40/40) on its survey evaluation. Customer service was also high on the list.

"Our customer service soared beyond the standard air traffic control," he said. "It's pretty impressive."

The 135-foot air traffic control tower oversees an airfield that spans 7,195 feet, with both small personal aircraft and Allegiant passenger planes. The staff in the tower works to maintain plane safety through directing.

A sonar system tracks the planes showing their wing number, and their proximity to the airfield which is represented in the inner most circle. Pilots communicate with the air traffic control center before they reach the inner circle to determine their landing trajectory.

"There's a lot of multitasking happening in this job," Harper said. "It takes a lot of practice and repetition to be able to handle so many tasks and conversations at once."

Up in the tower, air traffic controllers can see Boca Grande, high rises in Fort Myers and a small glimpse of the Gulf, all while they directed a total of 86,539 takeoffs and landings in 2022.

"It's a job you just don't ever get bored of," Harper said. "The staff, here, love their jobs."



Punta Gorda Airport's President Keren Mclendon, left, and Vice President of RVA's FAA FCT Program Stephen Smith, right, present the 2022 Facility of the Year award to Air Traffic Control Manager George Harper, middle.

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Over to the south of the air traffic control tower, Allegiant passenger planes can be seen along with the airport.