



## **St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport**

® A Pinellas County Government Service

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**For Immediate Release**

August 11, 2010

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### **Florida Department of Transportation selects St. Petersburg–Clearwater International Airport (PIE) as the Commercial Service Airport of the Year**

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On August 10<sup>th</sup>, at the annual Florida Airports Council Conference, Florida Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Kopelousos and the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) State Aviation Manager Aaron Smith presented the annual aviation awards, naming St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) the Commercial Service Airport of the Year.

Airport Director Noah Lagos on accepting the award stated, "We are so honored to receive this award. Our airport staff, airlines, and business/government partners work enthusiastically to serve our customers. Our passengers, visitors and locals, are greatly appreciated at PIE. Pinellas County's Board of County Commissioners and administrators, provide wonderful leadership and support of our operation. FDOT has been very supportive of our efforts to improve our facilities and serve the public. We have been very fortunate."

FDOT criteria for the award include safety, aesthetics (general appearance of the airport; friendliness, courtesy, cooperation, and efficiency of airport staff), and airport management (innovative programs, financial stability and optimum use of resources, knowledge of and compliance with state and federal rules and regulations; adequacy/currency of and compliance with airport master plan).

The airport's application highlighted it's five (now six) consecutive years with zero discrepancies on its FAA inspection, the completion of its terminal renovation project, its innovative and efficient management, and its appearance and customer friendly atmosphere.

Specifically, the airport recently completed a \$20.9 million Terminal Renovation Project. The innovative funding incorporated a "pay-as-you-go" plan with minimal impact to the airport's reserves, and without issuance of bonds or incurring any debt. The airport maximized grants (FAA and FDOT) along with passenger facility charges (PFC) to finance 98% of the project costs. The project was initiated in two overlapping phases. Phase II was designed in only 45 days in order to secure American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. The terminal, which was built in 12 phases over 54 years, remained open and customer friendly during the two years of construction. Additionally, PIE retains the lowest rates and charges of all Florida commercial service airports with no debt and no tax subsidies.

Our terminal transformation was described best by the project's Interior Designer Kelly Taaffe Noto, *"Our goal was to create a total tropical "distraction" from the otherwise stressful environment found in all airports. This was accomplished through several vehicles, the predominant design influence being the natural beauty of local beaches and sea life as well as classically tasteful beach cottage architecture. This all combined to give PIE a truly unique and memorable "signature".* The interior design is matched with a stunning public art collection of over 30 Florida artists' work, plus a new custom 45 x 5 ft. blown and painted glass wall to greet you at the main entrance, palm tree wall tile murals in the corridor, and a series of 11 sea creatures at your feet created in terrazzo tile inserts.

Beyond the stunning physical attributes, we believe we have a human "aesthetic" quality that lies in the charm and friendliness of the staff at the airport. In fact, just before embarking on the Terminal Renovation Project, we conducted a passenger survey in 2008. On questions concerning friendliness and helpfulness of staff, over 90% of passengers rated us as very good to excellent. The highest rating was achieved by TSA screening staff at PIE (95% very good to excellent). We believe our new amenities and surroundings add to the general sense of well being of our passengers and the airport staff and businesses serving the airport.

Creating a positive customer experience is also in the information we provide to our customers. Our brochures, route maps, website, newsletters, and even our airport video, all embody the leisure destination we serve – easy to use, cheerful, colorful, and refreshing!

The airport operates with a staff of 58, which includes 14 firefighters, as well as several full-time custodians. A key cost savings measure is the use of contract employees to lower operating costs. The airport's contract employees provide custodial, administrative support, golf course, traffic control, and perimeter security services.

PIE's operations and projects are managed through collaborative teamwork. Our team approach includes staff, tenants, and sometimes community members. The Terminal Renovation Project sought ongoing input from staff (including crafts workers, electricians, operations supervisors), tenants, and on specific elements, airport volunteers and a public art committee. Recently, a chamber ambassador group was invited to provide feedback on signage at the airport to solicit fresh eyes and points of view. Additionally, our Noise Abatement Task Force continues to provide leadership from community residents and aviation tenants.

Communication plays a key role and the Director holds "all hands" meetings and team-building/appreciation events with airport staff. Additionally, airport managers meet with tenants and partners in the airport at monthly Station Manager's meetings, and the Airport Director holds bi-annual "town hall" meetings with TSA staff. Airport tenants and employees are driven by a singular and common goal of providing the highest quality of customer service to the traveling public.

Since updating the Airport Master Plan in 2004, the airport has been steadily implementing various recommendations, such as evaluating construction of a parallel runway, land development projects, and the terminal renovation. PIE also completed a runway extension project which necessitated land acquisition to improve runway safety areas, and extended the main air carrier runway from 8500' to 9730', capable of accommodating transatlantic flights.

The airport property consists of 2000 acres with about half non-aviation usage, generating revenue from commercial ground leases. The airport also operates a 127-acre public golf course. The AIRCO Golf Course was envisioned in our 2004 Master Plan to eventually be converted into a mixed use commercial property consisting of aviation, office, and hotel designated parcels. During the past year, the airport completed an Environmental Assessment

and received a Categorical Exclusion. The Pinellas Board of County Commissioners approved the re-zoning application from recreational to commercial use after several public meetings with concerned residents. The commercial real estate arm of the airport has had a significant impact on stabilizing revenues for the airport during airline instability from aviation and non-aviation real estate development.

Generating an estimated \$925 million of economic impact to our community, according to the March 2010 FDOT report, reflects on the airport's management, the efficiency of the small staff, along with tenant, county, and community collaboration.

FDOT Aviation Manager Aaron Smith in presenting the award stated, "There were many outstanding nominations for the awards. FDOT recognizes the superior achievement of receiving the award in the state of Florida. St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport captured all the criteria: safety, aesthetics, and service."

St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport is proud to serve the community and the vital tourism industry. On behalf of the PIE family, we are honored to be recognized for our achievements. Congratulations as well to our fellow award winners – well done!

*Photo attached is Airport Director Noah Lagos receiving award from State of Florida Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Kopelousos and FDOT State Aviation Manager Aaron Smith. For airport photos, please visit [http://www.fly2pie.com/airport\\_news/media.asp](http://www.fly2pie.com/airport_news/media.asp) - password: fly2pie*

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