

MIA, one of the most efficient in the world

The Miami-Dade Aviation director was the keynote speaker at an informative Doral networking event in which he gave an update on Miami International Airport's (MIA) expansion project. The next phase of the capital improvement plan is expected to be completed in only two more years. MIA's director emphasized the importance and impact the airport has for the City of Doral, and said the airport is well on its way to becoming one of the most efficient in the world.

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Despite the budget cuts in all spheres of government and the economic crisis that seems not to be going anywhere, Miami International Airport (MIA) has had a positive year thus far, and it's on its way to becoming one of the most efficient airports worldwide, according to Jose Abreu, Miami-Dade Aviation director. Abreu, who was appointed to his post about four years ago, revealed this information during a luncheon held at the Doral Park Country Club and sponsored by the Doral and Airport West Chamber of Commerce. Abreu was the keynote speaker during a networking event in which he updated Doral residents and business owners on the "state of the airport."

"MIA has had a successful year, considering the circumstances," said Abreu during the presentation, in which Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez and Council member Robert Van Name were present. "We've only seen a decline of one and a half percent, through June," he added, emphasizing that other major airports in U.S. have seen a 20 percent decline in aeronautical traffic.

The traffic forecast had MIA at an estimated four percent decline in flights this year, but it won't even get to that, said Abreu, who feels confident the airport can beat the this prediction.

Abreu's optimism springs from all the positive recognition the airport has received in recent months. MIA did better than in previous years in customer satisfaction, increasing from 19th place to an amazing sixth, according to the most recent survey in customer service. One of the customers' top priorities was to have clean bathrooms, and Abreu seems to be working on it thus hoping to move up the ranks next time. In addition, MIA received the "Airport of the Year" award given by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

The good news was well received by Doral city officials, who seemed pleased about the airport's performance, especially because this municipality is greatly dependant on airport operations due to its industrial and commercial basis.

"Our city exists, in part, because of MIA," said Mayor Bermudez. "For us, as a city, the future and success of MIA is critical." More than 125,000 people come to Doral to work in businesses that have chosen this city as their home due to its strategic location it is conveniently close to the airport, which is a major gateway to mar-



kets in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Doral is not the only city that has benefited from its proximity to the airport, however. The entire county is dependant on airport operations considering it is the number one revenue producer in Miami-Dade. "One out of four jobs in Miami is in some way associated with this airport," said Abreu. And he seems to be a key figure in keeping up with the demands of a fast-paced world by continuing to make operations work at the airport, which was not always as efficient due to years of mismanagement. Mayor Bermudez noted Abreu has done "a fantastic job in correcting some of the difficulties he has inherited."

Abreu began overseeing the airport when the expansion plan was already underway and behind schedule, which raised the tab for taxpayers. It is the largest renovation of its kind in the world, costing one million dollars in debt service per day.

Although the cost is high, Abreu said the job must be done and it is now on schedule, and even ahead of schedule for some phases of the project. The master plan had to be updated in order to accommodate the increase in aeronautical activity, and at this point "it would be more

costly for us to stop construction than to finish it," he said. Abreu noted that while some other airports have stopped construction due to funding issues, MIA would see completion of the next major phase of the plan by 2011. If the plan had not been updated, the airport would have been working at maximum capacity by 2015.

Airport efficiency could be a serious issue affecting Doral businesses, so the mayor thought the update was helpful and informative. Bermudez commended Chamber President Felipe Madrigal for this initiative.

"A large percentage of our businesses are affiliated, in one way or another, with the airport. Having these types of events here, having Director Abreu here, telling us where they are at and where they are going, I think is of great benefit to our residents and business owners," said Bermudez.

MIA offers more international flights to Latin America and the Caribbean than any other airport in the country. Also, it is American Airlines' (AA) second busiest hub and the number one cargo international airport in the country, even receiving a cargo flight from Hong Kong for the first time. More than 34 million passen-

gers go through MIA every year, and this is why it is so important to move the renovations forward, said Abreu.

Although AA has reported losses and is cutting back on flights nationwide, they have added more flights at MIA, especially those to Latin America and Caribbean destinations.

Top goals for the airport chief include increasing capacity, while still improving and maintaining efficiency and security. A new runway has already been added, along with the renovations of the south terminal, which was completed in 2007 featuring new lighting, stores, and restaurants. Abreu noted that it is important to have the private sector operating at the airport because most of the revenues generated, about 75%, come from "non aeronautical" sources.

Included in the future plans is the construction of a new transportation hub known as the Miami Intermodal Center, (MIC). The MIC will be a link between the public transportation system and airport terminals. Car rental services will be offered, along with transportation to and from key points such as the Metro Rail and Tri Rail. This will get passengers moving faster and eliminate traffic congestion around the airport roads.

Airport administration is also considering the possibility of opening up some new space for development to the private sector in hopes of revitalizing the airport even more. Some plans include the construction of a new hotel, a convention/meeting center, and a convenience service plaza, although these are just ideas and nothing is set in stone yet.

One of the projects that will directly affect Doral is the construction of the causeway at northwest 25th street, from 82nd Avenue to the east side of the Palmetto Expressway, which has stopped until further notice because funds are not currently available due to legislative cuts in the state budget. The viaduct is only halfway done, and will be just a waste of taxpayer's money if not finished, said Abreu. Mayor Bermudez and Abreu said they will be working together on doing anything possible to finish the project, which is expected to reduce the cargo truck traffic that backs up Doral streets on a daily basis.

"We are working continuously to convince the State to apply for some of the federal funding that is available so we can finish the second portion," said Bermudez.