

Aviation-themed restaurant and event center trying to take off

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BY ERIC HAGEN
Sun Focus

Dining can be a welcome break for flyers and pilots at airports, but non-flyers are the likely user group for a new restaurant proposed at the Anoka County-Blaine Airport, according to its designer.

"This airport will not support a restaurant by itself," said Craig Schiller, creator of Flight Line Enterprises, a company set on creating an airport-themed restaurant and gift shop with an event center. "We knew there had to be more traffic."

Schiller estimates that 15 percent of the restaurant's revenue would come from the airport while the rest would come from other metro area diners.

Schiller began exploring the concept of an aviation-themed restaurant, gift shop and event center two years ago with Harvey Karth, former Lino Lakes Mayor who has worked with Northwest Airlines, the Anoka County-Blaine Airport and the Polar Aviation and Golden Wings museums at the reliever airport.

Karth told Sun Focus that he became interested in flying while serving in the Aviation Battalion of the U.S. Army in the early 1960s.

"I never became a pilot, but I became a good rider," Karth joked.

Karth's experience with aviation and the restaurant business and his working relationship with Schiller led Karth to a consulting role. He founded Mardes Restaurant in Circle Pines in November 1989

and sold it in November 1994. It is now called Matthew's Family Restaurant.

Karth met Schiller about eight years ago while they worked together at the Polar Aviation Museum, which closed in 1999. The museum displayed aircraft from World War II and had a gift shop.

At the same time, Schiller also leased space from Greg Herrick's 45,000-square-foot hangar for large events.

Herrick started to collect more vintage aircraft, however, and did not have enough room to lease space.

Polar Aviation closed and along with it went the event space and gift shop, which Schiller says he believes was successful.

Herrick opened the Golden Wings Museum, and stores his 26 1920s and 1930s vintage airplanes there. He told Sun Focus that he opens the facility once in a while for groups, but said it is not a typical museum.

Herrick does open it for Discover Aviation Days once a year; this year's event is taking place this weekend. A temporary gift shop is set up for this event and airplanes are moved outside to make space for a hangar dance.

Schiller said the event center he is planning could hold up to 800 people and host not only large corporate events, but trade shows as well such as the All Canada Show for sporting goods.

The Flight Line Café would seat up to 300 people, have patio seating and display actual uniforms and vintage aircraft parts around the restaurant. The food selection and overall atmosphere would be similar to an Applebee's, Schiller said.

The gift shop would include more than 500 aviation-themed products such as books, videos, models, toys and clothing.

The restaurant would be located on top of a slope just outside the airport fence. Schiller said the current entrance of the airport just off Airport Road would move further in to the T-intersection now inside the airport grounds where signage directs motorists to different areas of the airport.

The fence would move further in of course along with the

entrance, allowing space for the restaurant on top of the slope that is now enclosed. Schiller said the high vantage point would be optimal for viewing the whole airport.

"We want to bring people into the airport atmosphere and be able to see the planes take off and land," Karth said.

Schiller said the location would be easily visible from Highway 10, making it a hot spot.

"We feel that with the development of Blaine, with thousands of homes coming up, with the possibility of a Vikings stadium and with Medtronic being built (a new campus nearby in Mounds View), if we just capture five percent of them, that's a couple hundred people for lunch," he said.

Funding the project

When he spoke to Sun Focus last October, Schiller had hoped the Flight Line Café and Event Center would be financed by the spring of 2006 in order to break ground and be open later this year.

The project is far from being fully financed, but this is the way the business world works, Schiller said. Flight Line Enterprises is using a financing venture called SCOR, or small company offering registration. SCOR allows companies to sell common shares of stock without using brokerage firms.

One Flight Line share costs one dollar. The company wants to sell 925,000 shares in order to cover 25 percent of the project costs and receive financial assistance from the River Bank in St. Croix Falls, Wis., for the other 75 percent.

Schiller told Sun Focus that approximately 15 percent of the 925,000 shares have sold.

"I think people are just learning about it even though we've been working at it for two years," Schiller said.

The media have started to notice the concept, which has helped, Schiller said. Seven long articles or briefs have been published in local weekly and daily newspapers since last fall that are posted on Flight Line's Web site.

Another way to get the word out is through advertising. Schiller said they are putting

together TV commercials, but they have to raise enough money to advertise for project funding requests.

"It's a domino theory," Schiller said. "You take baby steps because it's not my money. It's investors' money."

The company is trying different concepts to attract shareholders. One fresh concept is the Prop Club for those who make an investment of \$5,000 or greater.

These VIP donors would have their names inscribed on a propeller displayed outside the event center's main entrance, receive a 15-percent discount club membership card for the Flight Line gift shop, receive VIP club table reservations with maximum seating of four and receive a propeller-shaped letter opener inscribed with "Prop Club Member."

Only 100 Prop Club memberships will be sold and they are running out fast, Schiller said.

Potential investors can call Schiller at 763-784-6400 for more information, or visit www.flightlineltd.com.