



CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Economic Development

WEEKEND WAVE

07-29-16



Friday Economic Roundup

Frontier Airlines coming to Punta Gorda Airport

By John Hielscher Sarasota Herald-Tribune

PUNTA GORDA -- In a big boost for Southwest Florida travelers, Frontier Airlines will begin service in late October to three cities from Punta Gorda Airport.

Frontier will offer nonstop round trips to Chicago, Philadelphia and Trenton, N.J., although not every day.

Frontier will become the second commercial carrier at Punta Gorda Airport, joining Allegiant Air.

The growing airport expects to serve more than 1 million passengers in 2016.

On Oct. 30, Frontier will start flights to and from Chicago's O'Hare Airport and Philadelphia. Those flights will be scheduled on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

On Oct. 31, the airline will start service to Trenton, flying on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

"We are proud to welcome Frontier Airlines to Punta Gorda Airport," Charlotte County Airport Authority Executive Director Gary Quill said in a statement. "Our goal is continued growth, and it is with new partners like Frontier Airlines that we can meet increasing travel needs and offer expanded destination options for Southwest Florida residents and visitors."

Frontier's schedule calls for departing Chicago at 8:15 a.m., with a return flight departing from Punta Gorda at 1:10 p.m.

The flight will leave Philadelphia at 4:20 p.m., and depart Punta Gorda at 8:10 p.m.

The airline will fly from Trenton at 6 a.m., with the return flight scheduled at 10:15 a.m.

"Punta Gorda offers travelers another great option when looking for warm weather getaways during the cold weather months in the northern part of the United States," said Daniel Shurz, senior vice president-commercial at

Frontier. "We're excited to offer travelers in the Midwest and on the East Coast nonstop service to a great vacation spot."

Frontier soars to Punta Gorda Airport with three nonstop routes

By LAURA RUANE News-Press

After years of trying, Punta Gorda Airport has landed service from a second commercial carrier.

On Oct. 30, Denver based Frontier Airlines will launch nonstop flights between Punta Gorda and Chicago-O'Hare, Philadelphia and Trenton, New Jersey.

The Chicago-O'Hare and Philadelphia routes will be seasonal; Trenton, year-round.

It will be Frontier's first-ever service to Punta Gorda.

"We are proud to welcome Frontier Airlines to Punta Gorda Airport," said Charlotte County Airport Authority Executive Director Gary Quill. "Our goal is continued growth, and it is with new partners like Frontier Airlines that we can meet increasing travel needs and offer expanded destination options for Southwest Florida residents and visitors."

Punta Gorda Airport's gain is Southwest Florida International's loss.

Daniel Shurz, Frontier senior vice president/ commercial, said "this is a transfer of service that was at (Southwest Florida International)."

"Punta Gorda Airport is meaningfully cheaper to use on a per-passenger basis," Shurz said. He estimates the airline will save more than \$10 per departing passenger by the switch.

Shurz emphasized, however, that Frontier has expanded significantly at Southwest Florida International in the past few years, and will remain a significant presence there. This winter, the airline will have 35 flights weekly out of Southwest Florida International and 10 from Punta Gorda Airport.

Frontier says that on Oct. 30, the airline also will inaugurate new service between West Palm Beach and Chicago-O'Hare.

From Southwest Florida International, spokeswoman Victoria Moreland noted the much-bigger Fort Myers airport offers things Punta Gorda does not have. This includes covered jet bridges to aircraft, which are especially appreciated in inclement weather.

Added Moreland: "We are very pleased Frontier is keeping the bulk of their service at RSW."

The new Frontier service thrills Charlotte County Airport Commissioner Pam Seay.

"Holy smokes! This is what the people are asking for - alternatives," Seay said.

Frontier is a great fit with the airport, according to Seay.

It's a low-cost carrier like Allegiant Air. Its service to Punta Gorda has proliferated over the past few years. Frontier, however, offers different destinations.

"This fits in with our business model: a small airport serving the leisure market," Seay said.

Increasingly, Punta Gorda Airport is winning over leisure travelers and part-time Southwest Florida residents who want budget airfares, but don't necessarily need an airline to offer daily service.

"For the past several years, we have worked hard to prepare for more flights and passengers. With both Frontier and Allegiant, we are well poised to continue this progress," Quill said.

Allegiant now serves 30 cities out of Punta Gorda. Airport officials estimate they'll accommodate 1 million travelers by year-end.

Seay believes that the new and enlarged Bailey Terminal played a supporting role in landing a second carrier.

Said Seay: "Opening up the new terminal showed that we are dedicated to servicing commercial airlines while we continue to maintain our general aviation airport and our commerce park."

FRONTIER AIRLINES

Headquartered in Denver, the airline currently serves more than 40 cities in the United States, Mexico and Jamaica on more than 275 daily flights. Employing more than 3,000 aviation professionals, the airline won the Federal Aviation Administration's 2014 Diamond Award for maintenance excellence, and was recently named the industry's most fuel-efficient airline by The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) as a result of technology and operational efficiency.

THE SCHEDULE

Frontier Airlines begins service to Punta Gorda Airport Oct. 30.

Chicago O'Hare (ORD) - Punta Gorda (PGD)

Leave ORD: 8:15 a.m. Arrive PGD: 12:19 p.m. Leave PGD: 1:10 p.m. Arrive ORD: 3:19 p.m. Aircraft: 180-seat A320

Frequency: Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday Philadelphia (PHL) - Punta Gorda

Leave PHL: 4:20 p.m. Arrive PGD: 7:16 p.m. Leave PGD: 8:10 p.m. Arrive PHL: 10:48 p.m. Aircraft: 180-seat A320

Frequency: Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday Trenton (TTN) - Punta Gorda

Leave TTN: 6 a.m. Arrive PGD: 9:06 a.m. Leave PGD: 10:15 a.m. Arrive TTN: 12:58 p.m. Aircraft: 150-seat A319

Frequency: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday

Frontier Airlines rolled out \$49 one-way introductory fares after announcing it will serve Punta Gorda Airport with three nonstop destinations starting this fall. Tickets must be purchased by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time, Wednesday, July 27. They are good for nonstop travel occurring from Oct. 30, 2016, through Feb. 8, 2017. Some blackout dates apply.

And, there are other caveats. Get the details at <https://www.flyfrontier.com/ways-to-save/online-deals/>. Use drop-down box to find "Fort Myers/Punta Gorda."

PGD: The little economic engine that could

By BILL JONES Sun Correspondent

In 1990, the total operating revenue for the Punta Gorda Airport was \$1 million. In 2015, it was \$8.5 million and climbing.

In 2009, Allegiant Airlines' first year flying into and out of the Punta Gorda Airport carried about 46,000 passengers. Last year, it was more than 625,000. By the end of this year, it is projected to surpass a million. The future is still uncharted.

From 2008 to 2014, PGD advanced in rank from the nation's 206th airport out of 406 to 104th out of 398. As a result, passengers are spending more and more big bucks in Charlotte County and beyond.

Lorah Steiner, Charlotte County's tourism director, estimates that last year approximately 10,900 visitors flew through Punta Gorda, and spent some \$9.5 million.

The first quarter of this year, approximately 5,850 visitors flew in through PGD, an increase of 41 percent over the first quarter of 2015, and they spent another \$5.8 million.

These figures are only for visitors who stayed in paid accommodations while they were here. It does not include thousands more who flew in from the frozen north to visit friends, neighbors and relatives in winter's warm, sunny Charlotte County.

These visitors shopped, ate in restaurants, visited entertainment venues, and contributed to the area economy probably by many more millions.

The county, Steiner said, has installed a visitor survey kiosk in the airport to gather more detailed information.

Although the airport is the principal component of the Charlotte County Airport Authority's business, the authority is also a landlord and a land developer with 38 businesses and some 950 employees, according to Gary Quill, CCAA executive director.

Allegiant alone, he said, has invested some \$75 million into its operations at the airport, employing close to 300. The airline's expanding itinerary now serves 30 cities in 14 states.

The authority also has income from industrial park leases, fuel sales, concessions and hangar rental. All 216 "T" hangers - named because they're shaped like a T - are full for the first time in recent memory. In the past, Quill said, up to 30 or 40 have been empty.

There's also more parking revenue in the future. Forced into using a nearby overflow parking lot in a field with a shuttle service, the authority contracted earlier this year to build an additional 100 regular spaces, only to add 300 more to the project.

The Western Michigan University College of Aviation will arrive in 2017 with staff and some 25 students and five or six planes, fueling the area economy still more.

And there are grants from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation as well.

The secret to the authority's success, Quill said, is that "we know our niche." That niche is "discretionary travel," rather than business travel, and keeping operating costs down.

A principal part of the niche is to keep travel costs low as well - the "ultra-low-cost carrier profit model." Allegiant's average flight cost out of PGD last year was \$79 compared with a comparable industry average of \$179.

There's also always the temptation to overbuild - Quill calls it the "edifice complex" - rather than to build incrementally, which keeps debt service down and finances positive.

Thus the recent bank loan of \$5.7 million, primarily to finance the terminal expansion, will be down to \$4.1 million with a payment in September.

Also as part of discretionary travel (airlinespeak for personal travel) is research profiling the area's potential. That research indicated there was a population of 1.4 million within 60 minutes of Punta Gorda, compared with one million within 60 minutes of the Fort Myers airport (RSW). Also, there was lodging for 67,000 within 60 minutes of PGD, compared with 62,000 within 60 minutes of RSW.

In this vein, Quill also likes to quote local banker Maryanne Mize's assertion that "visitation (is) followed by migration."

Another notch in the niche was maintaining the airport primarily for general aviation use - local pilots and their aircraft. With all the contretemps about expanding Allegiant flights, the facts often get lost in the discourse that corporate jets comprise 8 percent of airport operations, Allegiant takes 10 percent, and general aviation gets the remaining 82 percent.

With the authority's expanding passenger and flight horizons, opposition, primarily to flight noise, inevitably occurs, and has, including from residents of Burnt Store Meadows, who will have opportunities to meet with the authority to discuss their concerns.

But according to Quill, since Allegiant switched to Airbus aircraft, the noise level is 50 percent lower than with airline's former MDA80 carriers.

And projections for Western Michigan University operations indicate they will be flying "ultra-quiet" Cirrus aircraft, with most of the flight training occurring away from the airport and populated communities.

But how long will this expansion - and its infusion of millions of dollars into the Charlotte County - last?

"For a few more years," Quill said. "Growth will level off. It can't be 30 percent indefinitely."

But whatever the timeline, this "little engine that could," continues to make a significant impact on the economy of Charlotte County.

BY THE NUMBERS - PUNTA GORDA AIRPORT

2014: National rank in traffic: 104th (out of 398), advancing from 206th in 2008 2015: Total Operating Revenue: \$8.5 million, up from \$1 million in 1990 2016: Projected passengers: More than 1 million, up from 46,000 in 2009

22nd Annual Blue Chip Community Business Award

The 22nd annual Southwest Florida Blue Chip Community Business Award, coordinated and sponsored by BB&T-Oswald Trippe and Company and BB&T Bank will take place Thursday, Nov. 3 at Harborside Event Center, located at 1375 Monroe Street in Fort Myers. The annual Blue Chip Award program recognizes successful, small business owners who have overcome adversity to achieve success.

Larry Brudnicki, legendary U.S. Coast Guard Captain, has been selected as the keynote speaker for the 22nd Annual Southwest Florida Blue Chip Community Award luncheon.

Captain Brudnicki was the Commanding Officer of the USCGC TAMAROA in New Castle, NH where he performed two dramatic rescues during the worst weather in more than 100 years. This event became known as "The Perfect Storm" and inspired The New York Times best-selling book and the blockbuster movie starring George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg.

Captain Brudnicki retired from the Coast Guard in March 2002 after 30 years of active duty. During his career he supervised more than 15,000 search and rescue cases, which saved property valued at \$135 million and more than 1,600 lives. He also supervised the search for survivors of the Alaska Air Flight #261 tragedy.

Brudnicki holds a Merchant Marine Master's license and has won numerous awards for his accomplishments including, the Legion of Merit, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal (two time winner), the Coast Guard Commendation Medal (four time winner), the Air Force Commendation Medal, the Coast Guard Achievement Medal and the Humanitarian Service Medal (two time winner).

Now that he has retired, Brudnicki uses the experience he gained from leading successful high-risk missions with international visibility to deliver his message of leadership, teamwork and risk management. Brudnicki speaks to corporations, associations and organizations so that they can implement the steps necessary for success while avoiding pitfalls.

Charlotte, Collier and Lee County for-profit businesses that have been in operation for at least three years under the same ownership and employ five to 400 people are eligible for the Blue Chip Award. Applications must be submitted no later than Sept. 6, 2016 and independent judges will select the winning entry.

For information on attending the Blue Chip Award program or for submitting an application, please contact Stacey Mercado at 239- 433-7189 or SMercado@BBandT.com.

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ENTREPRENEUR NEWS

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