

EXPRESS yourself

Economic impact of Piper Memorial Airport

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Lock Haven Mayor William E. Baney III, as quoted in The Express on Page A1 of the March 8, 2016, edition, stated before City Council that Piper Memorial Airport "is a losing proposition right now," and that it "benefits only a certain few."

I would respectfully suggest that Mayor Baney is unaware of the airport's full economic impact on our community, and would like to address his misconceptions.

Six years ago, upon my retirement from academia, I established AvSport of Lock Haven, one of only three flight schools in the Commonwealth to specialize in Sport Pilot training.

Though a small limited liability corporation with only one full-time employee (myself), during its first six years of operation, AvSport contributed a total of \$35,160 directly to the city's coffers in the form of aircraft fuel sales and office and hangar rent.

We contributed an additional \$234,629 to various local entities over the same period, in the form of sales and use taxes accruing to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, millage to the Keystone Central School District, credit card and account fees paid to local banks, and materials and services purchased from local vendors to keep our office and aircraft running.

But the economic impact of one small business extends far beyond the direct expenditures of that business. Because AvSport specializes in a type of training not generally available in this region, we attract students from all over Pennsylvania, as well as the states of New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Ohio, Delaware, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

Each student traveling to Lock Haven for training or instruction represents an unknown but not insignificant number of hotel and bed and breakfast nights sold, restaurant meals purchased, and even auto fuel purchased from local gas stations.

If one were to assume that 50 students per year each stay in Lock Haven for an average of four nights, spending just \$125 per night for lodging and \$75 per day for food, AvSport has been responsible for an infusion of an additional \$240,000 into the local economy.

What do you think?

The Express welcomes letters to the editor as we encourage our readers to "Express Yourself" in this forum. Letters must be signed using the writer's legal name with a complete mailing address and home and/or daytime phone number included so we can verify the author. Letters dealing with private disputes will not be published. The Express reserves the right to edit or reject any letter. Submit a letter online at www.lockhaven.com or by e-mail to: news@lockhaven.com. Letters also may be sent by mail to: Express Yourself, c/o The Editor, P.O. Box 208, Lock Haven, Pa. 17745; or drop off in person weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

But wait, there's more.

Three years ago, AvSport became the Western Pennsylvania factory authorized independent repair center for Rotax engines (a division of Canadian aerospace conglomerate Bombardier), the best-selling aircraft engine in the world. Since there are only a few dozen such authorized facilities in the entire U.S., we have been attracting maintenance customers from all over the mid-Atlantic region. These maintenance customers also benefit the local economy when they visit our shop, since most aircraft repairs and inspections involve at least one overnight stay.

Thus, it is not unrealistic to estimate that, over its first six years of operation, AvSport has brought well over \$500,000 of economic activity into Lock Haven and environs.

That's half a million dollars in economic activity over six years, all generated by the smallest business on Piper Memorial Airport.

I hope this summary will help Mayor Baney and the Lock Haven City Council to see the bigger picture, and to regard Piper Memorial Airport as not at all a losing proposition, but rather an important asset, vital to our community's overall economic well-being.

Prof. H. Paul Shuch is founder and chief flight instructor of AvSport of Lock Haven, on the Piper Memorial Airport.