



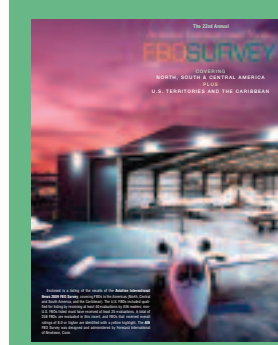
# Service reigns supreme

In today's economic climate, FBOs focus on keeping customers happy

by Matt Thurber

## Inside...

- Survey methodology (below)
- A look at the top 10 FBOs pg. 21
- Top 40 FBOs—Americas pg. 22
- Top 40 busiest FBOs—worldwide pg. 24
- Busiest countries pg. 24
- Busiest bizav airports pg. 26



For an electronic version of the complete survey results for the Americas (North, South and Central America as well as the Caribbean and U.S. territories), go to [www.ainonline.com/resource-center/](http://www.ainonline.com/resource-center/).

**A**mid a troubling decrease in business aviation operations, FBOs are struggling not only to survive but also to continue serving customers using leaner workforces and to fill hangars that once had lengthy waiting lists. Paradoxically, business boomed as fuel prices peaked at the end of last year's third quarter and dropped off dramatically as fuel prices fell, but the economy worsened. Clearly, the recession, public opinion about business jets and proposed new security regulations have dealt a triple-whammy to the service business infrastructure that lies at the heart of general aviation.

Even talk-show host Rush Limbaugh has commented on how the public backlash against business jets has affected FBOs. "That's where the corporate jets go, and they pay for jet fuel...and that helps the people selling it. And there are line personnel that have to empty the toilets and service and tow [the airplanes]. It's all private-sector money. But because it's a corporate jet, somehow it's stigmatized and the contributions made to private-sector stimulus in the process of buying, flying and servicing one of these jets is totally missed by people."

## It's the Economy...

The news from JPMorgan's Global Equity Research keeps getting worse, and a March report from the financial firm was titled, "The carnage continues." In this report, analysts noted that in January, U.S. business aviation takeoffs and landings were down 28 percent year-over-year, "the eighth straight double-digit decline and the largest drop since our data series begins in January [2000]." The level of flying in January was only 2 percent higher than during September 2001, when U.S. airspace was closed

after the 9/11 attacks, according to JPMorgan. Business jet inventories are rising while prices are falling in the pre-owned aircraft market, the report stated, adding that "further weakness likely lies ahead, with corporate profit expectations still falling."

During January 2009 versus January 2008, according to ARG/US's TRAQPak database, all business aircraft activity combined dropped 42.5 percent. This was a combination of Part 91 operations (down 38.1 percent), Part 135 (down 47.1 percent) and fractional (down the most, at 49.6 percent). Small-cabin jets flew the least, down a combined 47.3 percent for all

the operations categories. Large-cabin jets and turboprops dropped the least, 38.7 and 37.4 percent, respectively.

What this means is much less business for FBOs, although facility managers report various experiences in today's economy. Some continue to remain stable, which is the best that can be expected, while others have seen fuel sales—generally their major source of revenue—drop 20, 30 and even 40 percent.

## ExcelAire

"Certainly it is a very challenging time right now in the FBO business," said Gene Portela, FBO manager at ExcelAire, which opened a new facility early last year at Long Island Islip MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma, N.Y. ExcelAire is primarily a charter/management company and opened the FBO to make it easier to serve management and charter clients.

"The availability of retail customers was secondary," Portela said, but well worth targeting. "What we're doing here at ExcelAire is trying to out-serve the competitors. We're appreciative of the fact that we are remaining steady and busy through this downturn."

The company has an advantage—its location near New York

City and outside the city's Class B airspace. "It's a gem here in the heart of New York," he said. There are few arrival or departure delays, he added, and the airport is a half mile from the Long Island Expressway, which means a no-traffic 45-minute drive to Manhattan. While Teterboro is geographically closer, traffic congestion from the New Jersey airport to Manhattan often clogs the George Washington Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel. Another Islip advantage, he said, is much less time waiting for takeoff compared with other New York metro-area airports. "Within five minutes you can be on your way."

"Islip has never really been looked at as a corporate airport because it sits in the middle of Long Island, between the Hamptons

*Text continues on page 22 ►  
 Report continues on next page ►*



## Survey Rules and Methodology

The **AIN** FBO Survey asks readers to rate FBOs that they frequent in four key categories: line service; passenger amenities; pilot amenities and services; and facilities. For each of the four categories, the survey participant can assign a number from one to 10, one being worst and 10 the highest rating. To arrive at the averages for the categories, each FBO's ratings for each of the four categories are added and the resulting sum is divided by the number of responses received for that FBO. The overall average for that FBO is computed by adding the FBO's four category scores and dividing that sum by the total number of responses received in all four categories.

Only those invited to participate in the **AIN** FBO Survey can access the Web site to fill out the online ballot form. Each invitee receives a code

that must be used when filling out the ballot, and that code can't be used by anyone else, thus preventing ballot-box stuffing and ensuring that only those invited to participate can post their opinions.

Forecast International received 2,661 completed survey returns, up substantially from last year's 1,963. The completed return rate was 18.1 percent compared with 13.3 percent last year.

Respondents provided a total of 41,098 FBO ratings, which averages to 15 FBOs each (this includes 141 respondents who began but did not complete the survey). Last year respondents averaged 16 FBOs each; and the 2007 number was the same as this year.

While the survey asks **AIN** readers to rate FBOs and handlers world-

wide, in this issue only the results for facilities in the Americas are listed. The results covering the Americas FBOs (North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean) can be found in their totality at [www.ainonline.com/resource-center/](http://www.ainonline.com/resource-center/). The rest-of-world results will appear in **AIN's** May issue.

Survey participants added 110 FBOs to this year's list by writing ratings for facilities they use that were not listed. The total number of FBOs originally available to be rated was 1,509, so 1,619 received ratings. Write-in FBOs are added to the final results if they receive enough ratings, and they are also added to the list for next year's FBO survey.

—M.T.

## Top Ten FBO Highlights

An upset has taken place in this year's AIN FBO Survey, with perennial favorite and long-time top-rated Wilson Air Center (Memphis) moving to the number-two spot and Sugar Land Regional Airport's city-owned and city-run FBO jumping into first place with an overall average rating of 9.09, the only one above 9.00. Last year Sugar Land placed fifth, with an overall rating of 8.74, and Wilson Air Center was first, with the only rating higher than 9.00, at 9.03.

There are actually 13 FBOs in this year's Top Ten listing because a slight change was made so tied FBOs aren't counted as more than one facility. For example, Million Air (Dallas), Monterey Jet Center (Monterey) and Texas Jet (Fort Worth) tied for ninth place, so the next FBOs, also tied, are number 10. This avoids the confusion of jumping from one place to a higher number, say seventh to tenth, when there are multiple FBOs with the same overall rating.

Pentastar Aviation scored almost the same as last year's overall average, with an 8.84, down slightly from last year's 8.88, and with Sugar Land's vault into first place, Pentastar is now ranked third.

AirFlite Long Beach remains in the Top Ten but moved down to sixth from last year's third place, scoring a rating of 8.71 compared with last year's 8.81.

Meridian Teterboro is a new addition to the Top Ten list, with a rating of 8.74, up from last year's 8.59, although it should be noted that under the new system, Meridian would have been number 10 last year. This year it comes in at number 5.

Moving up from sixth to fourth place this year is Business Jet Center's Dallas FBO with a slightly higher rating of 8.75.

Banyan Air Services of Fort Lauderdale remains in the number-seven spot with a rating of 8.65, down slightly from last year's 8.68.

Tampa International Jet Center made a huge jump this year, up from last year's 8.24 and 35th place to 8.64 and inclusion in the Top Ten in the eighth ranking.

Two Dallas-area FBOs—Million Air Dallas and Fort-Worth's Texas Jet—tied for ninth place with ratings of 8.63. This reflects a slight decrease for that Million Air FBO, compared with last year's 8.68, and an increase for Texas Jet from last year's 8.54. Monterey Jet Center rounds out the three-way tie for ninth place.

Finally, in the Top Ten's tenth ranking are Arizona's Scottsdale Air Center and Enterprise Jet Center of Houston. The Scottsdale FBO jumped to an 8.60 rating, up from last year's 8.44 and 21st place. And Enterprise scored slightly higher than last year's 8.54, to move up to the tenth ranking slot.

All of the FBOs in the Top Ten and the Top 40 (see page 22) deserve recognition for providing top-notch service, especially in this challenging economy. —M.T.

Sugar Land



1

Wilson Air Center



2

Pentastar Aviation



3

Business Jet Center Dallas



4

Meridian Teterboro



5

AirFlite



6

Banyan Air Services



7

Tampa International Jet Center



8

Texas Jet



Tied for

9

Enterprise Jet Center



Tied for

10

## The Top 40-rated FBOs – U.S. & Canada

The annual AIN FBO Survey lists top-rated facilities according to the responses from pilots, dispatchers and users of FBOs. This year, the Top 40 FBOs in the Americas received overall scores of more than 8.00. The categories that users were asked to rate were line service; passenger amenities; pilot services; and facilities.

Rank	FBO	City	Airport	Overall Avg.
1	City of Sugar Land	Sugar Land	Sugar Land Regional (SGR)	9.09
2	Wilson Air Center	Memphis	Memphis International (MEM)	8.97
3	Pentastar Aviation	Pontiac	Oakland County International (PTK)	8.84
4	Business Jet Center	Dallas	Dallas Love Field (DAL)	8.75
5	Meridian Teterboro	Teterboro	Teterboro (TEB)	8.74
6	AirFlite	Long Beach	Long Beach Airport Daugherty Field (LGB)	8.71
7	Banyan Air Services	Fort Lauderdale	Fort Lauderdale Executive (FXE)	8.65
8	Tampa International Jet Center	Tampa	Tampa International (TPA)	8.64
9	Million Air	Dallas	Addison (ADS)	8.63
9	Monterey Jet Center	Monterey	Monterey Peninsula (MRV)	8.63
9	Texas Jet	Fort Worth	Meacham International (FTW)	8.63
10	Enterprise Jet Center	Houston	Hobby (HOU)	8.60
10	Scottsdale Air Center	Scottsdale	Scottsdale Municipal (SDL)	8.60
11	Irving Aviation Services	Gander, Newfoundland	Gander International (CYQX)	8.57
12	Jet Aviation Palm Beach	West Palm Beach	Palm Beach International (PBI)	8.55
12	Premier Air	Carlsbad	McClellan-Palomar (CRQ)	8.55
12	Skyservice Avitat	Toronto, Ontario	Lester B. Pearson Int'l (YYZ)	8.55
13	National Jets	Fort Lauderdale	Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Int'l (FLL)	8.53
14	Avitat Boca Raton	Boca Raton	Boca Raton (BCT)	8.47
14	Wilson Air Center	Charlotte	Douglas International (CLT)	8.47
15	Odyssey Aviation (formerly Million Air)	Charleston	Charleston International (CHS)	8.42
16	Avitat Westchester	White Plains	Westchester County (HPN)	8.41
16	Million Air	Anchorage	Ted Stevens Anchorage Int'l (ANC)	8.41
17	Swift Aviation Services	Phoenix	Sky Harbor International (PHX)	8.39
18	Bradley Pacific Aviation	Honolulu	Honolulu International (HNL)	8.38
19	Denver jetCenter	Aspen	Centennial (APA)	8.37
20	Atlantic	Waukesha	Waukesha County (UES)	8.36
21	Dulles Jet Center	Sterling (Dulles)	Washington Dulles Int'l (IAD)	8.35
21	Irving Aviation Services	Goose Bay, Newfoundland	Goose Bay (CYYR)	8.35
22	Atlantic (formerly Sun Valley Aviation)	Hailey	Friedman Memorial (SUN)	8.34
23	FalconTrust Air	Miami	Kendall-Tamiami Executive (TMB)	8.32
24	Avitat Ottawa	Ottawa	MacDonald International (CYOW)	8.30
24	Yellowstone Jet Center	Bozeman	Gallatin Field (BZN)	8.30
25	Jet Aviation	Teterboro	Teterboro (TEB)	8.28
26	SheltAir Aviation Services	Fort Lauderdale	Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Int'l (FLL)	8.26
27	Million Air	Houston	Hobby (HOU)	8.25
28	Duncan Aviation	Battle Creek	W.K. Kellogg (BTL)	8.24
29	Million Air	Salt Lake City	Salt Lake City International (SLC)	8.23
30	SheltAir Aviation Services	Jacksonville	Jacksonville International (JAX)	8.21
30	Vail Valley Jet Center	Denver	Eagle County Regional (EGE)	8.21
31	Avitat Winnipeg (Central Aviation)	Winnipeg, Manitoba	Manitoba/Winnipeg Int'l (CYWG)	8.20
32	Business Jet Center	Oakland	Metropolitan Oakland Int'l (OAK)	8.18
32	Del Monte Aviation (formerly Million Air)	Monterey	Monterey Peninsula (MRV)	8.18
32	Executive Jet Center/Aero Toy Store	Fort Lauderdale	Fort Lauderdale Executive (FXE)	8.18
33	Galaxy Aviation	Stuart	Witham Field (SUA)	8.17
34	Sun Air Jets	Camarillo	Camarillo (CMA)	8.16
35	UVavemex	Toluca	Adolfo Lopez Mateos Int'l (MMTO)	8.15
36	DB Aviation	Waukegan	Waukegan Regional (UGN)	8.13
37	Showalter Flying Service	Orlando	Orlando Executive (ORL)	8.12
37	Signature Flight Support (formerly Million Air)	Minneapolis	St. Paul Downtown-Holman Field (STP)	8.12
38	Henderson Executive Airport	Las Vegas	Henderson Executive Airport (HND)	8.11
39	TAC Air	Raleigh-Durham	Raleigh-Durham International (RDU)	8.10
40	Atlantic	Chicago	Chicago Midway International (MDW)	8.09

Source: AIN 2009 Americas FBO survey

Compiled by Jane Campbell with data provided by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.

► Continued from page 20

and New York City. Nobody's ever put the push on it. We are the perfect alternative to Teterboro because we offer clients true savings...in both time and money."

Having been in the charter business for more than 25 years, ExcelAire managers had a good idea of what they were looking for in an FBO, and the biggest issues were ramp and facility fees. "We do not charge ramp fees, parking fees, facility fees or overnight fees," said Portela. "That seems to get the attention of the customers." And Islip, even though it is an airline-served airport, has no landing fees.

ExcelAire keeps a fridge stocked with free beverages and offers free snacks to customers. The passenger lounge features a bar and fireplace, and pilots can use snooze rooms to get some alone time. ExcelAire has also gone through the procedure to become a gateway airport for the Washington, D.C. access program and offers all the necessary screening for DCA flights.

While the recession continues to sap the strength of financial markets, ExcelAire's FBO was able to maintain existing employee levels during the first quarter, and managers planned to review that in the second quarter. "We'll see if we can ramp up just a little bit," Portela said.

Oil prices have been somewhat stable, but Portela still watches fuel inventory and monitors wholesale prices daily. "I manage it so that I'm buying fuel when it's at the best price for the company. If the trend is on the way down, we'll stretch so we take advantage of buying later and putting it in the tanks at the right time."

The picture might look different were ExcelAire solely an FBO company. But by offering charter, aircraft management, hangar space, maintenance and FBO services, he said, "it's a good economic decision for [customers]. The diversity allows us to weather this storm better than a company that is just a single-source facility, whether it's an FBO or maintenance facility."

### Hangar 10

Given the tumult in the marketplace, one might wonder who

would be bold enough to launch a new FBO right now. Meet Brad Chandler, general manager of Hangar 10, and owner James Stowers III. Hangar 10 is a new facility planned to open in temporary quarters this month at Charles B. Wheeler Downtown Airport in Kansas City, Mo. The airport has had a single FBO—Executive Beechcraft, now owned by Signature Flight Support parent BBA Aviation—but will soon offer a choice to tenants and transient traffic.

### The Best Good FBO comment

"A company that looks after its team, respecting what each individual brings to the company. To have a happy workforce, one that enjoys coming to work, spells success for any operation. Good products will come only from happy people!"

—Duncan Finlay,  
first officer

Why open an FBO now, in this climate? It all started when Stowers needed a hangar for his new Cessna Citation Mustang, which is scheduled for delivery around the same time the FBO opens. Turning the need for a hangar into a full-service FBO "just seemed like a good opportunity for him," said Chandler, who plans to get his type rating in the Mustang. Once he decided to go through the trouble of building an FBO, Stowers wanted to make it "the nicest in the country," Chandler said, "a gateway to the city. An airport is a first impression for a lot of visitors. This will make the right kind of first impression."

Stowers and Chandler aren't building just a new FBO; they want Hangar 10 to be an "aviation service company." According to Chandler, "the key is exceeding on the service side." Hangar 10 is optimized to serve turbine-operating customers, and the company's agreement with the airport is to sell only jet-A and not avgas. Hangar 10 is adjacent to a new general aviation complex being built at the airport, which will offer self-serve avgas.

Continues on page 24 ►



► Continued from page 22

Building a new FBO, Chandler said, “gives us a unique opportunity to focus on the service end. We’ll have fewer operations and tailor ourselves to turbine operations. If we make a mistake, we will own it, and every employee will be empowered to make it right for the customer.”

Hangar 10’s first phase of construction includes installing a fuel farm, a parking lot and a 3,500-sq-ft temporary building from

which it will operate for about a year while the FBO is under construction. Plans call for a 91,000-sq-ft complex on 10 acres, with three hangar bays covering a total area of 56,000 sq ft. The 28,000-sq-ft FBO terminal will offer something new for pilots: overnight rooms with fold-down beds, desk, entertainment center and private bathroom with shower. The fitness room also has separate men’s and women’s locker rooms and showers.

The FBO will offer concierge services, conference rooms, customer and pilot lounges, offices for hangar tenants and other companies, on-site rental cars and a weather/flight planning room.

“We feel confident we’ll fill the hangars with based customers,” Chandler said. “They’ve bought into the concept and the approach we’re taking and our focus.”

While the recession makes it challenging to decide to build a new FBO, Hangar 10 is taking a cau-

tious approach to growth. Opening the temporary facility, Chandler said, will help the new FBO’s management evaluate how rapidly it can grow. And this will help the company avoid the worst case of adding a lot of employees without having the business to support them. “This allows us to evaluate how we go into this,” he said.

Hangar 10 plans to add charter/management services. “In the long run we’re bullish about corporate aviation,” Chandler said. “In the short run, it isn’t a bad time to build a facility; there are benefits. If you look historically at the amount of jet fuel sold at that airport, it’s big enough to support two facilities. And we feel good about the companies based at our airport and the way they use aircraft. Jim and I feel strongly that business aircraft are tools to build business. In the long run, nothing can replace a business aircraft transporting a group of people to a remote location to do business. There will be a short period where people might back off a little and be careful how they use aircraft. I just don’t see a big backing off of that tool because the smart companies will continue to use tools to help their companies grow.”

#### Odyssey Aviation

“Things have slowed down a bit,” said Ken Allison, president of the Odyssey Aviation chain of seven U.S. FBOs, which is also in a marketing partnership with Odyssey Aviation Bahamas. “Some people are hurting bad, but there doesn’t seem to be rhyme or reason.”

As of January 1, all of Allison’s FBOs have switched to the new Odyssey Aviation signage. The FBOs used to be part of the Million Air franchise network. In most of his locations, he said, fuel volumes have dropped a little, “but we’re still holding our own.” The worst location has been at Chicago’s Midway Airport, which has a special standing that will make business there challenging for at least the

#### The Best Bad FBO comment

“Understaffed FBOs hurt everyone involved; a rundown facility makes substandard service even more apparent; outrageous mark-ups on fuel and handling charges covering the airspace into the flight levels put a taste in your mouth that even the mouthwash provided in some restrooms won’t remove. And number one are the employees who have attitudes that tell you that they don’t care that you are there and they just can’t wait for you to leave.”

—William Robb,  
manager of flight operations

next four years. Midway is close enough to President Barack Obama’s Chicago home that it virtually shuts down, at least for most general aviation traffic, whenever the President is home.

There is good news on the Odyssey front, however. Construction of the chain’s new Lakefront Airport facility in New Orleans, housed in temporary quarters since Hurricane Katrina, has finally begun and it should be ready for move-in by year-end. “That’s exciting for us,” Allison said. “We’ve put up with a lot during the last three years.”

He added that Lakefront Airport officials have been helpful in clearing the final approvals so construction could finally begin. One benefit of having waited so long, however, is that construction prices have moderated, following the big jump in New Orleans’ construction projects after the hurricane. Coincidentally, the stylish art deco Lakefront Airport terminal building has finally received the go-ahead for renovation after it was nearly destroyed during the hurricane.

Allison is interested in adding other FBOs to his chain, he said, “but right now, with seven, we want to be strategic with the next ones we get and make sure it’s the right fit and the right city, demographics-wise. There are some great opportunities out there.”

As the owner of a small privately held chain, Allison observed that the large FBO chains are facing increasing pressure during this recession. “They’re really counting on the gallons flowing through,” he said, “and now with the lack of airplanes, there’s no way they’re going to achieve those gallons, and they can’t do it by raising their prices.

The three big chains [Atlantic, Landmark and Signature] are going to have tough times. That’s one of our advantages; being privately

Continues on page 26 ►

#### Top 40 Busiest FBOs – Worldwide (according to number of responses)

FBO	Airport	Responses	Overall Average
Jet Aviation	Teterboro (TEB)	380	8.04
Meridian Teterboro	Teterboro (TEB)	254	8.46
Signature Flight Support	Miami International (MIA)	253	6.89
Landmark Aviation (formerly Jimsair Aviation Svs.)	Lindbergh Field (SAN)	248	6.23
Atlantic	McCarran International (LAS)	240	7.98
Atlantic	Chicago Midway International (MDW)	239	8.16
Denver jetCenter	Centennial (APA)	234	8.39
Atlantic	Pitkin County/Sardy Field (ASE)	221	7.56
Atlantic	Teterboro (TEB)	220	7.7
Signature Flight Support	Logan International (BOS)	215	6.07
Signature Flight Support	London Luton (EGGW)	209	7.31
Skyservice Avitac	Lester B. Pearson International (CYYZ)	206	8.68
Landmark Aviation	Washington Dulles International (IAD)	205	7.28
Scottsdale Air Center	Scottsdale Municipal (SDL)	203	7.75
Epps Aviation	DeKalb-Peachtree (PDK)	200	8.4
Signature Flight Support	San Francisco International (SFO)	200	6.35
Avitac Westchester	Westchester County (HPN)	192	8.53
Landmark Aviation	Scottsdale Municipal (SDL)	191	8.18
Vail Valley Jet Center	Eagle County Regional (EGE)	191	8.15
Million Air	Addison (ADS)	184	8.67
Jet Aviation Palm Beach	Palm Beach International (PBI)	181	8.67
Monterey Jet Center	Monterey Peninsula (MRY)	179	8.84
Naples Airport Authority	Naples Municipal (APF)	178	6.94
Landmark Aviation	Los Angeles International (LAX)	175	7.31
Jet Aviation	Hanscom Field (BED)	173	7.66
Banyan Air Services	Fort Lauderdale Executive (FXE)	171	8.53
Atlantic (formerly ACM Aviation and San Jose Jet Center)	Norman Mineta San Jose Int’l (SJC)	167	7.79
Swift Aviation Services	Sky Harbor International (PHX)	167	8.12
KaiserAir Jet Center	Metropolitan Oakland Int’l (OAK)	166	7.93
Million Air	Bob Hope (BUR)	162	7.86
Galaxy Aviation	Palm Beach International (PBI)	160	8.36
SheltAir Aviation Services	Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Int’l (FLL)	160	8.04
First Aviation Services	Teterboro (TEB)	157	6.15
Atlantic	John Wayne/Orange County (SNA)	156	7.94
Signature Flight Support	Palm Beach International (PBI)	156	7.15
Signature Flight Support	Washington Dulles International (IAD)	155	7.42
Business Jet Center	Dallas Love Field (DAL)	152	8.68
Signature Flight Support	Morristown Municipal (MMU)	152	7.24
TAG Aviation	Farnborough (EGLF)	152	8.46
Wilson Air Center	Douglas International (CLT)	149	8.62

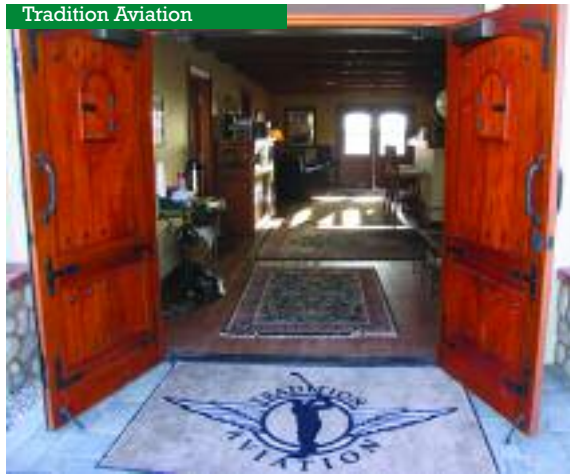
Source: AIN 2009 Americas FBO survey

Data compiled by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.

#### Busiest Countries for Business Aviation (according to responses)

Country	Responses
United States	30,651
Canada	1,315
United Kingdom	995
France	825
Italy	557
Brazil	528
Mexico	503
Germany	500
Switzerland	465
Spain	257

Source: AIN 2009 Americas FBO survey  
Data compiled by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.



► Continued from page 24

held, we keep the overhead low.” Allison also believes that individual owners of FBOs are coming out ahead now because they share a passion for aviation. “That’s what we’re here for. Sometimes [the big chains] forget that. For them it’s a passion for making money. Our reputation is more important to us than anything.”

**Tradition Aviation**

FBOs that are experiencing 20- to 40-percent declines in jet-A-fueled traffic might be

surprised to hear there is an FBO that is not seeing a decline in business. “We have been fortunate,” said Ann Goodwyn, director of operations for Tradition Aviation at Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport in Palm Springs, Calif. “Every month this year so far we have matched the numbers we had for last year.”

Goodwyn attributes Tradition Aviation’s good fortune to a quirk in the local economy. Many customers own vacation homes in Palm Springs and because of the difficulty of selling real estate, they are hanging on to their vacation homes and flying their aircraft to Palm Springs to use them. That Cochran Airport is much less crowded than nearby Palm Springs International Airport and closer to the development trends in the Coachella Valley helps, too.

It also helps Tradition Aviation that it is located near the site of the gigantic Horse in the Sun event at Desert Horse Park, held for eight weeks every winter. “When the show is going on it brings lots of business,” Goodwyn said.

Tradition Aviation also got its start in a temporary building and with its own fuel farm. Its focus first was on building 160,000 sq ft of hangar space, and plans are to build a new FBO terminal “in the near future,” Goodwyn said. “We’ve been trying to hold off for a little, hoping things would stabilize,” but construction will start in a few months because Tradition already has contracts signed with the county to build the new FBO terminal. “We’re still finalizing plans for the new facility,” she said.

Signature Flight Support also has an FBO at Cochran and provides strong competition, according to Goodwyn. “Of late they have really stepped up their game,” although Tradition still has a 75- to 80-percent market share for jet-A sales, she said. “They’ve taken away their ramp fees and they’re contacting every customer. [Tradition general manager] Penny [Nelson] and I have been in the FBO business 25 years each. It’s nothing new to us. I believe if you give great customer service and are fair on your prices, customers will be happy and will return. People seem to be happy.”

Goodwyn and Nelson are co-owners of Tradition Aviation and can often be seen on the ramp greeting customers. “We’re hands-on managers,” Goodwyn said. “I believe customers appreciate [that]. We work alongside our other employees. I don’t

**Top 40 Busiest Airports for Business Aviation – Worldwide**  
(according to number responses)

Airport	Responses
Teterboro (TEB)	1,100
Palm Beach International (PBI)	497
Westchester County (HPN)	486
Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Int'l (FLL)	435
Centennial (APA)	432
Washington Dulles Int'l (IAD)	425
Chicago Midway Int'l (MDW)	417
Dallas Love Field (DAL)	411
Scottsdale Municipal (SDL)	402
Hobby (HOU)	379
DeKalb-Peachtree (PDK)	370
McCarran International (LAS)	357
Van Nuys (VNY)	331
Sky Harbor International (PHX)	311
Fort Lauderdale Executive (FXE)	303
London Luton (EGGW)	302
Lester B. Pearson Int'l (CYYZ)	301
Los Angeles International (LAX)	284
Monterey Peninsula (MRY)	280
Metropolitan Oakland Int'l (OAK)	268
Miami International (MIA)	260
Hanscom Field (BED)	257
John Wayne/Orange County (SNA)	250
Lindbergh Field (SAN)	248
Bob Hope (BUR)	239
Addison (ADS)	237
Boca Raton (BCT)	224
Geneva (LSGG)	222
Pitkin County/Sardy Field (ASE)	221
Orlando International (MCO)	220
Boeing Field/King County Int'l (BFI)	215
Logan International (BOS)	215
Nice-Cote d'Azur (LFMN)	215
McClellan-Palomar (CRQ)	214
Paris Le Bourget (LFPB)	206
Chicago Executive (PWK)	201
San Antonio International (SAT)	200
San Francisco International (SFO)	200
Tampa International (TPA)	200
Long Beach Airport Daugherty Field (LGB)	199

Source: AIN 2009 Americas FBO survey  
Data compiled by Forecast International of Newtown, Conn.

expect them to do anything we wouldn't do ourselves. That sets a good precedent."

### First Aviation

Pilots flying into Teterboro, N.J., may have noticed the huge new FBO between the airport's two runways, but many may have thought that First Aviation Services is a private facility not open to transient traffic. In fact, the FBO has been open since April 2007 and it welcomes any customer.

It took three years to build First Aviation Services in what used to be wetlands (environmentally remediated as part of the construction approval process). The new FBO was the brainchild of Joe and Florence Ritorto, who owned the former Beechcraft East FBO that used to be on the northwest corner of the airport where most ground traffic enters the airport via Industrial Avenue. First Aviation Services was at that location since 1986, but the small 14,000-sq-ft facility closed after the Runway 19 ILS clear zone was expanded.

The Ritortos engaged architectural firm Gaddis Wind Associates to design the new First Aviation facility, and they incorporated everything they knew about what an FBO should offer. The FBO, now owned by Goldman Sachs, sits on 24 acres, a large plot of land for such a congested airport. The advantage of having so much space is that the architect was able to design a taxi-in, taxi-out ramp, so airplanes never need to be moved once they arrive, and pilots and passengers know exactly where their airplane is when leaving. "We can handle hundreds of operations per day," said Bill Thomas, First Aviation's managing director. "We run a lean line crew that isn't repositioning airplanes. They're serviced where they park."

The 120,000 sq ft of hangar space is organized into three 40,000-sq-ft clear-span bays, each with offices and a door to the outside automobile parking area. Hangar doors move on heated tracks to prevent ice formation in the winter. The FBO has its own 150,000-gallon Air BP fuel farm and dual-backup generators that can power the

entire facility. First Aviation is also an FAA- and EASA-approved repair station and a preferred provider for Gulfstream. The maintenance shop is open and staffed 24/7.

The two-story glass-fronted terminal features a large arrival canopy that protects passengers from not only the weather but also from prying eyes. More than

125 security cameras (monitored and recorded 24/7) help the security team keep a lookout. Aiding security is the FBO's location a half mile from the nearest public street behind forested and fenced land. All ground traffic must pass through a manned checkpoint, and it's almost impossible for nosy TV crews to see what's going on at

the FBO from the public street. Another advantage of the FBO's location is quicker driving time to roads leading to Manhattan.

Despite the recession, in just two years, Thomas said, "we are the second largest FBO in operation here. We've maintained that market share throughout the downturn, which really started

*Report continues on next page ►*



First Aviation

► *Continued from preceding page* in August/September 2008. The number of new aircraft trying our facility is even growing in this downturn economy.”

### Enterprise Jet Center

Both Enterprise Jet Center at Houston's Hobby Airport and Scottsdale Air Center in Scottsdale, Ariz., ranked number 10 in this

year's AIN FBO Survey. The level of activity at Enterprise, said director of sales and marketing Heather Hardwick, “is still relatively busy. We have slow days, but we haven't seen layoffs. And we haven't cut back on hours.” Although the economy is a concern, Hardwick is more worried about the potential impact of the Transportation Security Administration's Large Aircraft

Security Program (LASP) proposal, which is now in the post-commentary evaluation stage.

### Scottsdale Air Center

At Scottsdale, airport activity has dropped 30 to 35 percent, according to Scottsdale Air Center general manager Tommy Walker. “We're holding our market share,” he said. Walker is seeing fewer

airplanes visiting the airport and regular customers flying fewer trips. The facility has had to lay off people due to the economy, and managers have stepped in to make sure the FBO's high level of customer service is maintained.

### Wilson Air Center

Bob Wilson, owner of number-two rated Wilson Air Center, con-

## Headset Winners

AIN readers who participate in the FBO survey qualify to enter a drawing for one of three prizes. This year we awarded two Sennheiser Noise Gard Pilot Headsets to Andrew Benedict, GIV chief pilot for Evergreen Helicopters International; and James Jessup, line captain for Lowe's. A Sennheiser Noise-Canceling headset was awarded to Peggy Sebald, senior corporate aviation assistant for Eli Lilly and Co. □

ceded “business is off a bit, and the problems that we're seeing within the political environment are not helping.” These problems include the pending TSA LASP regulations covering aircraft that weigh more than 12,500 pounds and the TSA's new security directive for badging all airport employees, which allows no means of creating universal badges that apply at all airline-served airports.

Wilson Air, with three FBOs, is well known for its high level of service, according to v-p Dave Ivey. And during the recession, Bob Wilson has made it clear that service levels must be maintained. “We're making smart adjustments,” Ivey said. Some workers' hours have been reduced, but the concierge remains on duty and there are always at least two line personnel working each shift.

“We're alive and well in all three cities,” Ivey said. “Our margins are down,” mostly because even with relatively low fuel prices pilots continue to seek the best deal. “It's a competitive environment,” he said. “We're having to compete on a nationwide level and other FBOs are fighting for the same business, all with reduced margins and gallons.”

Like Odyssey Aviation and other small FBO companies, Wilson Air does not have to please financially strapped private equity owners. According to Bob Wilson, “There are a lot of advantages to being privately owned. We answer only to ourselves. We make decisions that might have long-term implications for us, where a private-equity or publicly owned company has to make them on a quarterly basis. A month ago Textron was talking about maybe shedding Cessna but reneged on it quickly. That's how those folks think. We don't think that way. It's the same at the private-equity funds; they're looking for a return. Based on today's deal, they've got a heck of an uphill battle. □

To see the FBOs that narrowly missed inclusion in this year's chart, go to [www.ainonline.com/resource-center/](http://www.ainonline.com/resource-center/).