It was almost painfully uncomfortable. The recently hired customer service representative was up to her belt buckle in alligators, all the line techs were missing, her line chief was deep in conversation with an important customer and everyone else from management was in a meeting off site. Meanwhile, the captain of a transient charter turboprop was waiting patiently to place his fuel order, and he had a fairly simple question. He asked if the FBO had a ramp service fee, and if there was a minimum fuel order that would waive the fee. But she wasn’t grasping his question, calling several times on her walkie-talkie and repeating—loudly and somewhat frantically, for everyone to hear—“The guy with the Conquest wants a discount.”

The charter crew was beginning to lose patience because the line tech who had marshaled them to their parking place had promptly disappeared. That left their passenger on the apron to lug his golf clubs while hunting for the one unmarked door that led through a storage hangar to the terminal lobby—which was very nicely appointed.

Everything got sorted out eventually, but not before the charter captain rolled his eyes a couple of times, making a mental note never to return. The stated goal of the Safety Management Program is to reduce ground-related accidents by 50 percent over the next five years. NATA has retained consulting firm Simat Helliesen & Eichner (SH&E) to help develop the program. SH&E has experience carrying out high-level assignments for airports, airlines, repair stations and FBOs worldwide.

NATA president James Coyne said that the program is designed to generate a culture of zero tolerance, in which safety on the ground equals that in the air. “The Safety Management Program is for FBOs, charter operators, maintenance and flight-training providers and airline-service companies,” said Coyne. “NATA will create a Web-based program whereby any company can securely manage its internal safety reporting and analysis without needing to create its own software.”

One of the first priorities of the initiative is to create a mechanism for benchmarking accidents and incidents. Coyne said that, for the first time, all major aviation insurers have indicated a willingness to work with the association to create a database to track claims and benchmark progress.

Claims information will be gathered quarterly, and analysis will be disseminated to the industry. The database is designed to track previously unavailable ground-accident data, such as time of day, weather, levels of ramp traffic and so on. Categorizing ramp accidents is a first step toward creating a baseline of what such accidents cost the industry. From there, NATA hopes to be able to substantiate how much safety programs are saving. Some major stakeholders are supporting the program with money and manpower. They include United States Aviation Underwriters; Global Aerospace; Phoenix Aviation Managers; W. Brown and Associates; XL Aerospace; ExxonMobil; ConocoPhillips; and AirBP Aviation. Other major stakeholders are expected to join the effort shortly, Coyne said.

The latest adjunct to the Safety First training program is NATA’s Safety Management Program, designed to create an industry-wide database of information on all accidents, incidents and other losses that can help generate standards and programs to mitigate the risk across the board. The stated goal of the Safety Management Program is to reduce ground-related accidents by

Safety and security top list of FBO priorities

by Mark Phelps

The Department of Homeland Security is still getting accustomed to its role as the new 800-pound gorilla inside the Washington beltway. To date, most of its attention has been focused on airlines. General aviation businesses—including FBOs, charter providers and independent Part 91 operators—continue to await concrete
guidelines or new rules regarding security, fearing the worst while hoping for the best.

For example, Wilson Air Center is configuring its new hangar/building complex at Memphis International Airport to accommodate future needs for security on the cargo side of the ramp. Vice president David Ivey told AIN, “We anticipate there could be issues with cargo handlers having access to airside portions of cargo loading areas. We’re planning our new buildings with an eye toward establishing a system where cargo can be efficiently offloaded from trucks on the streetside, then loaded onto aircraft on the ramp without compromising security buffers.”

**Airline Service Opportunities**

It has to be significant that this year’s incoming NATAs chair comes from the airline service side of the industry. Sally Leible likes the synergy she sees between general aviation FBOs and airline service companies on airports. She also sees good levels of cooperation in dealing with airport authorities as a unified entity rather than coming from separate directions.

But also of interest is her assertion that the current airline fiscal crisis will generate opportunities for new business on the general aviation side of the airport. As airlines struggle to control bottom lines, they are outsourcing more and more work that previously was conducted in house. That may include baggage handling, into-wing fueling, de-icing, even customer check-in at the terminal. One area in which some FBOs have looked into airline opportunities is servicing ramp vehicles such as trucks, hydrant refuelers and baggage conveyors.

As Leible works her way through her 12-month term as chair of NATAs, it will be interesting to see how much more crossover there is between FBOs and airlines on airports that serve both segments of aviation.

**Fuel Prices**

Many FBO executives express concern about the effects of high fuel prices on the economic recovery. With crude oil still topping $50 a barrel at press time, there is no near-term recovery in sight. Many FBO managers have mentioned that they are seeing new strategies evolve to maintain profit margins.

John Mason, director of FBO services for Jet Aviation in West Palm Beach, Fla., told AIN he’s seeing an uptick in posted retail fuel prices nationwide to offset the heavy discounting. He said pilots used to roll onto the ramp without asking about fuel price, but now, he said, “I’m on the phone all day doing fuel deals.”

**What’s Your FBO Worth?**

For those with an eye to cashing in on a lifetime of work building an FBO business, now might be a good time. There appears to be strong interest in the general aviation service industry from financial advisors. They see good opportunities in the line service business, and maybe better financial promise in the maintenance side.

Mark Chambers of the Aviation Resource Group International told AIN that maintenance providers offer a steady flow of business that is predictable—more so today than ever before with computerized maintenance service plans for engines and airframes. “There’s less room for variation in maintenance,” he said, because aircraft operators might curtail flying hours in lean times, but major maintenance events are scheduled months or years in advance, with little chance they will be canceled or postponed.

As to whether the aviation service industry is as ripe for consolidation as some financial analysts believe, Signature Flight Support president Beth Haskins agrees that the industry is “fragmented.” She told AIN, “When the largest player has only 10 percent of the North American market, you’d have to say that’s a very fragmented industry.” Of course, her company is the “largest player” to which she referred.

But Haskins recognizes that the reason the industry is diverse is because it was established by independent operators who know and understand their local clientele and the economic and political minutiae of their airport. For that reason, the Million Air Interlink model of establishing a national presence through a common name and common standards establishes many of the advantages of consolidation.

At the same time, the franchise-owner aspect of the Million Air program ensures that the sense of personal attachment and commitment to the success of the business remains. Along with that comes the incentive to go the extra mile to market the facility and general aviation at the airport—and to fight the legal and political battles that seem to be so much a part of operating a general aviation business today.

**Medium-size Chains**

Over the past decade or so, the FBO industry has consolidated in the form of some medium-size chains that have emerged as significant players. TAC Air, SheltAir and Galaxy have established networks of several facilities each—and they always report they are on the lookout for more. Each has its own reason for bringing more FBOs under the corporate roof, but economy of scale is certainly one of the economic draws.

Bob Wilson, founder of Wilson Air Center, recently added the FBO at Charlotte-Douglas (N.C.) International Airport to his award-winning company. Ivey told AIN, “Bob’s business model has always been to have between three and five FBOs. That provides economy of scale without losing control of the product.” In short, when you get spread too thin, there’s too much danger of a company’s integrity slipping through the cracks.

Our readers’ top 10 FBOs

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1. **Wilson Air Center (MEM)**

   **Avg. Score: 8.339**

   It defies almost every nook and cranny of convention, but Wilson Air Center celebrates its fifth consecutive top rating in this year’s AIN FBO Survey. There have been other dominant FBOs, but none with this kind of consistency. As usual, the answer lies not in one simple formula, but rather in the multifaceted culture and personality of the company and the people behind it.

   Owner Bob Wilson, son of Holiday Inn founder Kemmons Wilson, grew up within the service-and-hospitality culture that imbues the entire company. The elder Wilson founded the Holiday Inn motel chain and is credited as the originator of the concept of the modern motel. The concept came to him while on vacation trips with his family, including young Bob, during the early 1950s.

   Bob Wilson was bitten early in life by the aviation bug and still loves to fly. He maintains currency in the company’s Citation Excel, CJ2 and Pilatus PC-12. He flies a Cessna 210 to commute to Wilson Air Center from his 800-acre property, complete with a 3,500-foot lighted airstrip. He has managed to combine his love of flying with the service-and-hospitality mentality that he grew up with. The result is Wilson Air Center. Usually, when such a person decides to establish an FBO, the bean counters run for cover. Most of these labors of love founder, lured from the path of fiscal righteousness by the siren whine of turbofan engines. But through a combination of shrewdness and practicality combined with natural enthusiasm, Wilson has made it not only work but flourish.

   Wilson Air Center is a subsidiary of the Kemmons Wilson Companies conglomerate and boasts 125,000 sq ft of hangar area and 32,000 sq ft of office space within its complex. Vice president David Ivey, an industry veteran and a key element in the long-term dominance of Wilson Air Center, said, “We always keep a few spots open for new based customers and tenants.” Ivey added that Wilson Air Center accommodates a heavy influx of transient pilots and feels the need to strive continuously to keep their best interests in mind.

   This year, Ivey told AIN, Wilson has acquired a former Northwest Airlift training building at Memphis International Airport (MEM) and, within 12 months, expects to complete another new 25,000-sq-ft hangar adjacent to that 12,000-sq-ft building. A second 25,000-sq-ft hangar is also part of the long-range plan.
Ivey told AIN gaining airport approval for new projects is always the hard part. Building the facility comes fairly easily for Wilson Air Center. He said, “Besides his involvement in Wilson Air Center, Bob is also the construction guru for the parent company and has built warehouses, time-shares, shopping centers and, of course, hotels and motels.”

Bob Wilson has told AIN, “We really do operate more like a family than the way most businesses run. Very few people have left here without going somewhere to better themselves, and we’re excited when someone from here goes on to become a mechanic or into business for himself.”

When we have a big uptick in business for a mechanic or into business for himself, and we’re excited when they’ll drive in from outside of town to help out.” To stay involved in current issues affecting business aviation, Wilson also serves on the NBAA’s security council.

But the biggest news at Wilson Air Center is really about 450 miles down in heath and instituting an aggressive home-based discount program.

Still, Ivey said Wilson is always watching its margins closely to maintain a healthy business plan. “In Memphis, we did it by lowering the cost of fuel by $1.25 and instituting an aggressive home-based discount program.”

Ivey said to AIN that large-aircraft charter associated with the racing teams is one of the biggest opportunities at CLT. He said, “In one morning, we had 600 passengers—pit crews and so forth—pass through our terminal in one hour starting at 3 a.m.” Part 125 charters in Boeing 757s and Airbus A319s are a regular sight on the ramp at CLT.

So far, Ivey likes what he sees at Charlotte. In Memphis, and so does the airport authority. Ivey said, “We opened on February 1, and in that month we sold 37 percent more fuel than Signature did that month in 2004. We did it by lowering the cost of fuel by $1.25 and instituting an aggressive home-based discount program.”

Ivey said Wilson is always watching its margins closely to maintain a healthy business plan. “In Memphis, we had a record year in 2004. Our margins are up over the year before, and the company is financially sound.” So it looks as though Wilson Air Center, either at Memphis or Charlotte, is going to be near the top of the survey heap for years to come.

Southern Jet vaulted to second position in this year’s survey, climbing an impressive 79 places to do it. Clearly, its new facility, opened in September 2003, had much to do with the FBO’s improved showing, but general manager Dave Tresaloni said a healthy dose of southern hospitality is a large part of the recipe.

Southern Jet took over Raleigh Flying Service at RDU in 1997 and inherited a gaggle of 40-year-old hangars—the so-called “terrible blue buildings.” Tresaloni said the owners assured him they would build new facilities. The result has been the addition of 44,000 sq ft of new hangar space and the new 9,000-sq-ft terminal office complex. There are also a scattering of corporate condo hangars and individual T hangars. Southern Jet’s leasehold at RDU covers about four-and-a-half acres in an unusual configuration.

The airport authority built a $45 million general aviation terminal building, in which it envisioned the airport’s two FBOs (Piedmont Hawthorne is the other one) having their offices and customer counters side-by-side. Over the years, Tresaloni convinced the airport that the FBOs should have their own lobbies, pilot lounges and customer-service counters. “I explained that it wouldn’t be good for either FBO to have the other’s customers standing side-by-side negotiating fuel prices. We weren’t interested in having a live auction on the spot,” he said.

Now, Piedmont Hawthorne is on one side of the municipal terminal and Southern Jet is on the other. There are pilots’ snore rooms and other facilities in the common terminal, but a lot of floor space has been rented out for offices. “They’re also trying to market the facility for weddings and functions,” added Tresaloni.

Asked what he thinks sets Southern Jet apart as a successful FBO, Tresaloni said, “Our staff understands that we service aircraft, but we do business with people. There’s the difference. We continuously remind our staff, ‘These folks are from out of town. We need to do anything we can to make them welcome—not only to Southern Jet, but to the city.’”

Chelite includes a mix of business executives traveling to or from the nearby Research Triangle Park and Wendover Airports, a family of parents in and out of the three nearby universities: Duke, North Carolina State and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The new terminal includes an improved pilot lounge, wireless Internet access, a full kitchen and a laundry.

FBOs are in competition with each other in the Dallas area, with WSI weather terminal and clearance delivery, private sleeping quarters with showers, and complimentary bagels, fresh fruit, juice, tea, lemonade, coffee, popcorn and fresh-baked cookies. Business Jet Center’s location offers quick and easy access to downtown Dallas.

The new Business Jet Center sister facility at Oakland (Calif.) International Airport opened in November and is showing...
Monterey Jet Center (MRY)  
**avg. score 8.132**

Monterey Jet Center was initially conceived as a sort of gated hangar village for private owners and operators, similar to the Quail development at Las Vegas International Airport. But when the original partners, who were involved in commercial real estate in the Monterey area, asked to be allowed to build a private fuel farm, the airport authority insisted the facility be open to the public. So the project became an FBO.

The partners broke ground in June 1997 and the first hangars were occupied in September. Original plans called for a total of 70,000 sq ft of hangar floor area under roof, but that number has since doubled—and all the space is occupied.

There is a two-story main office/terminal building of 10,000 sq ft, with 14 offices leased upstairs and two more downstairs, a pilot lounge, conference room and flight-planning area with a WSI weather kiosk. Just like at Starbucks, wireless Internet access is available throughout the building.

Nate Young is the president and general manager of Monterey Jet Center. He is a veteran of seven years with Clay Lacy Aviation at Van Nuys, Calif., and Galvin Flying Service in Seattle before that. Young told AIN, “I like to think I brought the best elements of Jim Galvin and Clay Lacy with me. They were my mentors in this business.” Young recalls when Lacy used to keep his Republic Seabee amphibian at Galvin Flying Service, which is how the two met.

“Their operations stressed service,” said Young. “Jim Galvin taught me that you might not have the fanciest facility, but if you provide good service, people will notice.”

That philosophy figures into the physical floor plan of Monterey Jet Center, said Young. The customer-service desk and the line-service desk are adjacent to each other. “That kind of hand-to-hand capability is important,” he said.

“And the kitchen is right next to the line-service area for the same reason. The operations manager and customer-service manager have offices that overlook the ramp.”

*Continued from page 22*

### The Top 30 FBOs

In its annual report on FBOs, AIN traditionally prints a list of the top-rated facilities rated by users in the survey. For this year, 27 FBOs in North, Central and South America finished with an average overall rating in all four categories of 7.755 or better, earning them the coveted “red dot” status. Of those facilities, 17 received red ratings in all four categories: line-service, passenger amenities; pilot amenities; and facilities. In one of the most competitive fields in the aviation services industry, it is significant that the gap between the number-one finisher and that of the two that tied for 29th place is a mere .612 of a point.

1. Wilson Air Center  
2. Southern Jet/Avitat  
3. Business Jet Center  
4. Monterey Jet Center  
5. Scottsdale AirCenter/Avitat
   
6. AirFlite/Avitat  
7. Million Air/Regent  
8. Skyserve/Avitat  
9. Jet Aviation/Avitat  
10. Jet Aviation/Avitat  
11. Regal Aviation  
12. Million Air Dallas  
13. Irving Aviation  
14. Showalter Flying Service  
15. Pentastar/Avitat  
16. Denver jet Center  
17. Pl. Lauderdale Jet Center  
18. Alliance Aviation/Avitat  
19. Vail Valley Jet Center  
20. TAG Air  
21. Petersen Aviation/Avitat  
22. Regional Jet Center  
23. Avenex  
24. Million Air  
25. National Jets Air Center  
26. Skyserve/Avitat  
27. Stuart Jet/Avitat  
28. Galaxy Aviation  
29. Atlantic Aviation  
30. Million Air Columbus

* tied for 29th position


### Scottsdale AirCenter/Avitat (SDL)  
**avg. score 8.121**

General manager Tommy Walker at Scottsdale (Ariz.) AirCenter had planned to retire in Arizona after a 13-year stint at the helm of the Toyota-owned AirFlite FBO in Long Beach, Calif. But AirCenter president Herb Marchman, who also operates a sister facility in Santa Fe, N.M., arm-wrestled him back to work. Walker has helped put the facility on the map.

Scottsdale AirCenter is a ground-up facility, 14 miles’ drive southeast of Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. It opened its doors in March 2003, with three 25,000-sq-ft hangars and an elegant 8,000-sq-ft terminal building featuring a gallery with the work of some 30 local artists.

Initial plans called for heavy maintenance to occupy one of the hangars, and Airinc is now in place as a tenant, performing maintenance on several business jet types and some avionics work to boot. Duncan Aviation also has its satellite avionics shop on site.

Phase two, a corporate hangar complex, is under construction on the other side of the airport, with five hangars (totaling some 100,000 sq ft) and 15,000 sq ft of office space. Two-and-a-half acres of ramp space are already completed on the eight-acre segment of the AirCenter leasehold, and Walker reports that three hangars will be completed by year-end. “That’s a reality,” he said.

An Exxon Avitat dealer, Scottsdale AirCenter has an 80,000-gallon fuel farm, 60,000 gallons of which are jet-A. A nearby industrial complex has direct access to the airport, and the municipal government is encouraging development at the field. Last year, Walker said the AirCenter was still the new kid on the block, but his hangars were almost full. This year, he said, “The hangars are all full. We’re north of 40 percent market share on the field.”

Walker mentioned three specific events in Scottsdale that keep his ramps full and his line-service techs hopping. In the January through February time frame every year, the city hosts the Barrett-Jackson exotic auto auction; the FBR Open golf tournament (formerly known as the Phoenix Open); and the National Arabian Horse Show. Scottsdale Air Center is the official FBO host for all three events.

Walker, who is accustomed to the large dollar figures associated with business jets, was astounded to learn that banks had arranged lines of credit for bidders at the Barrett-Jackson auction totaling some $447 million. Many of the bidders arrived in jets that
Good FBO

“Clean, modern facility, competent line service, Internet access in the pilot lounge and WSJ weather.”
– C. Bunker, pilot, Challenger 604, Learjet 60

“Attentive personnel–problem solvers.”
– Clarence Abel, captain, Challenger 604

“Great line service and people [who are] responsive to unusual requests.”
– Keith Anderson, director of aviation, Gulfstream IV-SP, GII

“They do what it takes to keep my passengers moving.”
– Rich Sh Personally, chief pilot, Hawker 800XP

“Good service for passengers first, then crew concerns.”
– Chad Peterson, line pilot, Challenger 604

“Very simple! Customer service.”
– Tim Hurgrin, captain, Gulfstream V

“Clean facility, knowledgeable line service staff, quality customer service.”
– Paul Caf, director of aviation, Sabreline 60

“They take care of the passengers’ needs, aircraft needs and pilots’ needs.”
– Allen Lambet, chief pilot, Beechcraft Duke 407

“Safe operating procedures by line service and good customer service representatives.”
– Jon Baxt, director of safety, Continental Aviation, Inc.

“One that offers service with a smile no matter what you’re flying.”
– Gary Potts, chief pilot, Cessna 414

Bad FBO

“Understaffed with rundown facilities and bad attitudes.”
– Troy Bucker, product support pilot, Gulfstream G100, G200

“Unresponsive to crew’s needs–and high prices.”
– Keith Anderson, director of aviation, Gulfstream IV-SP, GII

“Line service that has an attitude–that they’re doing you a favor–and that you’re interrupting.”
– T. Motszek, captain, Falcon 900EX

“Old facilities, slow line service and customer service representatives unfamiliar with aviation.”
– Gary Porterfield, instructor, Learjet 55, Piaggio Avanti

“Bad organization due to poor management.”
– Tim Farm, co-pilot, Gulfstream V

“Attitude. Not understanding or caring about what I need that day to do my job.”
– Barry Lintz, line captain, Challenger 600, Citation 560

“Line service that is unhelpful, or not around upon our arrival.”
– Gary Winter, pilot, mechanic, King Air 300

“A bunch of people sitting around waiting for someone to order fuel.”
– Jeff Biron, captain, Gulfstream V

“Uncooperative, rude tip mongers.”
– Kel McKenna, captain, Citation 680

“Lack of coordination between customer service and line crew.”
– L. Direy Nicholas, aviation manager, Mitsubishi MU-2

continued from page 24
remained parked at Scottsdale AirCenter.
“When you go to an auction like that,” he said, “you stand way back in the room and you think twice before you even scratch your head. You just may buy something.”

AirFlite/Avitat (LGB) avg. score, 8.106

AirFlite has ranked in the top 10 in the AIN North American FBO survey for the past dozen years. In 1994 it placed first in the survey despite the fact that it was less than two years old at that time.

AirFlite’s performance is doubly impressive because Long Beach, Calif., is not an easy location to operate a top-caliber FBO. Real-estate values are on the high end of a steep national curve, usually meaning that an FBO either has to economize on staff and facilities or charge premium prices for fuel and services.

AirFlite’s leasehold covers a mere 14 acres at LGB-postage-stamp size compared with some facilities. But the operation has managed to pack a generous amount of utility into its small campus.

The latest addition to AirFlite’s attractive lobby is a 600-gallon saltwater fish tank. The high glass windows in the lobby create a sunny openness that is rare among FBOs.

Toyota Motor, AirFlite’s parent, bases its fleet at LGB, and the four-story terminal complex includes offices for the parent company on the top levels.

AirFlite is also the official FBO for the Toyota-sponsored Long Beach Grand Prix auto race, which will be held this year from April 8 to 10.

All the top racing teams’ flight departments use the facility as their destination at LGB. As a result, AirFlite hosts a pilots’ party during the race, with a large-screen television and ample food and beverages.

Though AirFlite has its share of celebrity traffic, general manager Damon Alderson characterizes the facility’s clientele just as a corporate destination. With Boeing producing the Air Force’s C-17 in AirFlite’s back yard at Long Beach, visitors include a substantial array of vendors for the project and a sprinkling of high-level military personnel as well.

Million Air/Regent (STP) avg. score, 8.102

Over the years, Million Air/Regent president John LaFontsee has been beatifying the facility to promote what he still considers the facility’s strongest attribute: STP is closer to destinations in downtown Minneapolis and those in downtown St. Paul than the FBO at Minneapolis/St. Paul International (MSP).

And because air traffic to and from the “smaller airport” is not burdened with air- line congestion and delays, in-and-out times are considerably faster. That’s not to say amenities, service and an attractive terminal aren’t a large part of the Million Air/Regent formula. All are top-notch, and Million Air Regent has cemented its alliances with Honeywell for engine maintenance and Duncan Avionics, each with facilities at STP.

For those who haven’t been to the “alternative” Twin Cities airport, the natural selection would seem to be MSP, especially if there’s an airline connection in the flight plan. Not so, says LaFontsee. Million Air/Regent maintains the road trip from its terminal at STP to the airline terminal at MSP takes only five minutes longer than the trip from Signature at

Million Air/Regent is a Phillips 66 Performance Center, with jet-A and 100LL. There is a facility’s user fee, waived with fuel purchase. Volume buyers get fuel discounts starting at the 250-gallon break point. For avgas customers, there is a 50-cent-per-gallon discount on weekends. Customer service is available 24/7 with prior notice.

Million Air/Regent has password- required gates to all entrances, and all hangar doors can be opened only with regularly changed code numbers. Cameras

Service Attitude and a Facelift Can Work Miracles

This was a year of dramatic improvements among several FBOs rated in the annual survey. Leading the pack was Southern Jet (see mini-profile on page 22), which jumped 79 positions from its finish last year to number two spot.

But three facilities made triple-digit gains this year–led by Trajen Flight Support at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston (IAH). Trajen jumped an amazing 117 places from 2003’s numbers.

Bruce Roberts, general manager at Trajen, shared his thoughts on the turnaround with AIN. He said, “We took over the FBO in February 2003. To be polite, it was in desperate need of an upgrade–in the facility and in leadership.”

Trajen began its overhaul that did not involve a new building, but rather a total redesign of the existing space. “We made it more user-friendly,” said Roberts. “That involved segregating all the different functions–separating the internet kiosk from the flight-planning center and the pilots’ lounge. The remodeling was completed just before Houston hosted the Super Bowl on February 2 last year. I believe that’s when a number of customers were introduced to the new look.”

Roberts said it was more than paint, fabric and carpet that constituted the makeover. He said, “We immediately put the emphasis on a service atmosphere, and that really turned things around. We were seeing a lot of opportunity taxi by our ramp, so we did our best to toss out the wheel chocks and say, ‘Hey, Come on over and see what we can do.’” The result, said Roberts, was an increase in fuel uplift at IAH of 500,000 gallons compared with 2003’s numbers.

Two other facilities also registered amazing triple-digit gains this year’s survey. Swift Aviation, with jet-A thru 100LL, moved from 116 places to Piedmont Hawthorne at Raleigh-Durham International Airport in Phoenix moved up 118 places and Piedmont Hawthorne at Raleigh-Durham International improved by 104 slots over its previous rating.
Jought needs with a certain element of awe. From his ready to go. Where I worked in Vancouver on February 28. He views his new position maintaining 24-hour surveillance on the Continued from page 26

8 Skyservice/Avitat Toronto (CYYZ) avg score 8.040

Alain Champonnois assumed his duties as general manager of Skyservice Toronto on February 28. He views his new position with a certain element of awe. From his ready to go. Where I worked in Vancouver on February 28. He views his new position maintaining 24-hour surveillance on the main hangar. From where I’m sitting I count 14 aircraft on our ramp ready to go. Where I worked in Vancouver was a busy operation, but nothing like this.”

The Skyservice organization was founded in 1986 with an FBO at Montreal Dorval Airport. Twelve years ago, Russell Payson bought and set up shop in a hangar that had been occupied by an airline on the south side of CYYZ. Skyservice refurbished the building elegantly and the FBO has been a perennial favorite of survey respondents. Skyservice visitors to CYYZ ever since, rated in the top 10 in all AIN’s FBO surveys dating back to 1998.

In November 2001, Skyservice cut the ribbon on its midfield complex. It now has a total of some 200,000 sq ft of hangar space, said Champonnois. “We always have room for transients,” he said, “which is important in Canada during the winter.”

Skyservice has an additional 35,000 sq ft of courtesy office space for tenants adjacent to an 11,000-sq-ft terminal building. Enhanced amenities include upstairs pilot and executive lounges with quiet rooms; a fitness-and-weight room; conference rooms; and wireless Internet access throughout the complex. The front of the facility is a vast expanse of glass with stellar views of the ramp and runways.

The FBO’s sister facility is at Montreal’s Dorval Airport. Both offer computer weather forecasting and flight planning; catering; de-icing facilities; limousine service; on-site car rentals; courtesy shuttles; hotel reservations services; and nearby restaurants.

Beginning last year, Jet Aviation renewed its emphasis on maintenance at Teterboro with OEM agreements with Honeywell and Embraer for its Legacy business jet. Szczeczowski expects to announce additional OEM service-center agreements over the next few months. “Having such agreements allows us to provide an important service for transient customers who have a maintenance need, as well as our based tenants,” he said. With its top-10 rating again this year, Jet Aviation Teterboro continues to prove that having a New Jersey attitude can still mean top levels of service.

9 Jet Aviation/Avitat Teterboro (TEB) avg. score 8.055

With a fine view of the skyline of New York City, where real estate is among the most expensive anywhere in the world, Jet Aviation Teterboro is the largest FBO in the chain, with 1.1 million sq ft of hangar, office, workshop and ramp space. Its nine hangars span 214,474 sq ft.

Teterboro is among the busiest general aviation airports in the country, and Jet Aviation is among the most popular FBOs on the field. In fact, one publication called it the world’s busiest FBO. Located at the south end of the runway complex, it sits on property separate from much of the general activity surrounding the rest of the airport.

General manager Mike Szczeczowski recalled last year’s Republican National Convention, saying, “It was the first time we experienced screening from the TSA [Transportation Security Administration].” After a few hours on the first day, we were able to work out some kinks and misunderstandings and things ran smoothly for the rest of the week.”

At three years old, the terminal building at Jet Aviation Teterboro ranks as one of the most functionally elegant in the country. It brings to mind the lobby of a five-star hotel. But Szczeczowski reiterated this year what he said last year. “A beautiful building is not enough, and anyone can pump gas. Service is everything.”

“Most pilots understand that fuel prices in the New York area aren’t going to be among the lowest in the country, but they expect a level of service to match the price. We’ve continued to make that our focus. Business at Teterboro is up about 15 percent over last year, and it’s good to see business around the New York area on the rise as well.”

Teterboro is also a busy jumping-off point for international travel.

10 Jet Aviation/Avitat West Palm Beach (PBI) avg. score 8.011

For hurricane-ravaged Jet Aviation at West Palm Beach, Fla. (PBI), finishing in the top 10 in this year’s FBO survey is the equivalent of a thoroughbred placing in the Kentucky Derby with one of its legs broken. “A quarter of our facility was blown away,” director of FBO Mason told AIN, “but we managed to keep that transparent to our transient customers. We were doing heavy maintenance with half the hangar roof missing and the back wall blown out.”

Jet Aviation replaced the roofs on four out of five hangars. Making the best of a bad situation, Mason said he is grateful he was able to upgrade the engineering on the buildings he needed to refurbish—and he now has freshly painted hangar floors.

Traffic at PBI has been very good recently, Mason reported, and Jet Aviation has been working hard to maintain service levels while watching its profit margin.

He said, “Every day it’s a matter of balancing price against service. Aircraft operators are willing to pay a premium for good service, but with the costs of aircraft operation rising across the board, we’re seeing more and more savvy pilots, dispatchers or flight department managers calling ahead for fuel discounts. I’m on the phone all day long doing fuel deals.”

Mason said the e-mail era is also opening new avenues to fuel discounting. He also said he’s seeing a trend toward inflated retail prices to support the heavy discounting nationwide.

Mason said his goal is to retain as many of his senior employees as possible for as long as he can. “They get to know each customer’s individual likes and dislikes and what they want. It makes a big difference when a line tech can greet a passenger by name. We have a good mix of senior staff and young hustlers.”

AIN Needs You!

To Write In Evaluations on All FBOs

Depending on whose numbers you look at, there are some 4,500 FBOs in the U.S., far more than can be reasonably surveyed for business aircraft operators. That’s why AIN needs your help in determining which FBOs participate in the AIN FBO Survey year after year. We need you to write in those FBOs you’ve visited that are not listed on the form.

The survey is geared toward rating the most visited FBOs in the system—and that mission often appears unfair to some of the best facilities in the country that happen to be located in smaller markets.

It is statistically necessary to have a minimum of 40 evaluations to present a fair evaluation of a facility. This year, Piedmont Hawthorne at Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) received the most evaluations, by far, with 420. It was followed by Las Vegas Executive Airport (LAS) with 339 and Corporate Jets at Scottsdale (Ariz.) Airport (SDL) with 307.

As noted on the back of the attached survey report, the process starts with a mailing during Thanksgiving week to some 12,000 pilots, flight department managers and dispatchers. The mailing includes a survey form with a list of 300 FBOs and a rating sheet in the four categories you see in the report format. Those 300 FBOs are the ones that have historically shown themselves to be the FBOs business aircraft travel to consistently.

If an FBO that is listed on the survey form we mail to participants does not receive the requisite 40 evaluations, we drop it from the form for the next year, and another FBO takes its place on the list. That’s where write-in evaluations play a large role. Logic tells us that the best way to determine where business aircraft are going day-to-day is to look for the FBOs that respondents write in on their evaluation forms.

Any FBO that receives at least 10 write-in evaluations will automatically appear on the form for the following year. So, please, write in the facilities that you visit that are not listed on the form.

The survey report is not intended as a Michelin Guide to every FBO that provides jet fuel. For space purposes in the magazine, it is limited to about 250 or so of the most frequented facilities. Determining which facilities AIN ought to add is largely up to the readers.

This year, survey respondents wrote in about 320 evaluations for FBOs that weren’t on the form. No FBO received more than five write-ins, an indication that respondents are traveling to a wider range of destinations. ❑