

Opening of airport's new terminal on final approach



Concrete finisher Danny Stewart smoothed out fresh concrete in front of the new terminal at McClellan-Palomar Airport, which opens Nov. 17 as part of a \$20 million renovation. *Charlie Neuman / Union-Tribune*

By Steven Mihalovich
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Five outdated buildings at McClellan-Palomar Airport in Carlsbad will soon be replaced by a new seashell-inlaid terminal designed to evoke the area's signature sea and sky.

Due to open Nov. 17, the terminal will mark a new era for one of the busiest single-runway airports in the country, where more than 215,000 takeoffs and landings occurred last year by private planes, corporate jets and airline commuter flights.

The \$20 million airport project, funded by a \$13 million Federal Aviation Administration loan and an airport-user enterprise fund, is just a portion of the major renovations occurring at the airport.

Private investors have put \$80 million into new hangars and facilities.

Airport manager Willie Vasquez said

the new terminal was designed for efficiency and to meet modern security concerns, while decreasing operational floor space to 18,000 square feet.

"We took a disorganized group of buildings and consolidated them into one," Vasquez said.

Efficiency wasn't the only concern, however.

"A terminal here needs to be a little more interesting than you have anywhere else," said Robert Wadell, chief executive of Wadell Engineering, the firm that designed the building.

"If it's sitting in the middle of Kansas, it's 'so what?' But people in Carlsbad and North County are a little more discriminating. They expect more."

The exterior features swirling concrete patterns containing crushed shells, while the arrival area will include a water feature

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Local market to determine future growth

and numerous plants.

Inside, the terminal includes four ticketing counters, a baggage carousel and a 3,000-square-foot Landings restaurant. To accommodate growth, the new terminal has more of office space than needed by United and Vision, the two airlines that serve the airport, Vasquez said.

And the new terminal has modern restrooms.

Peter Drinkwater, the county's airport director, said the old terminal's restroom, which had inadequate ventilation, was closed months ago.

"The washroom was not much better than an outhouse," he said.

The new terminal is also expected to resolve numerous safety concerns.

At the old terminal, rental cars had to cross near the runway to be delivered and people could potentially come close to spinning propellers, Drinkwater said.

To increase security, the waiting room for departing passengers is now separated from the lobby and 30 security cameras will be installed around the airport.

The terminal has been deemed energy efficient, earn-



Workers finished the floors on the new \$6.5 million terminal at McClellan-Palomar Airport recently.

ing a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. Windows in the building can be opened.

"In keeping with the flavor of Carlsbad and its nice weather, we wanted to bring outside in," Vasquez said. "We don't have to air-condition all the time, and that lowers our energy costs."

The project carries a \$20 million price tag. The terminal cost \$6.5 million, with the rest going for grading, improvements to the apron, new access roads and an elevator for the 700-vehicle parking lot down the hill from the terminal, Vasquez said.

To pay off the federal loan, the airport will begin charging for parking in April, Vasquez said.

With the terminal complete, McClellan-Palomar Airport's commercial operations are

poised to take off. The airport served 55,000 commercial passengers last year, Drinkwater said.

Commercial travel accounts for only 5 percent of operations, however, with corporate travel and general aviation making up the rest.

A Regional Air Transportation Plan for all county airports is under way. Drinkwater said it will provide direction for McClellan-Palomar's future, but the local market will decide the airport's future.

"All we've done is modernize it," Drinkwater said. "The question is, 'What comes next?' The needs of North County will shape what the airport will be over the next 10 to 15 years."

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