

FROM RUNWAYS TO REVENUE: ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF YOUR LOCAL AIRPORT

BY GOLDEN SHOVEL AGENCY



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DEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS & COMMUNITY LEADERS,

I am delighted to share with you this comprehensive whitepaper, which sheds light on the often-overlooked economic potential of general aviation airports in the United States, particularly in rural areas. As an aviator, flight instructor, and community leader, I have witnessed first-hand the significant impact that airports can have on local economies. Unfortunately, I have also seen many communities neglect their airports, missing out on the tremendous benefits that local aviation can provide.

In my travels, I have landed at numerous airports and always look forward to exploring the nearby towns, meeting the residents, and experiencing the local culture. Yet, too often, I find that communities lack the necessary accommodations for travelers, prompting me to leave without truly engaging with the area - that's a missed opportunity for local communities!

As an ardent aviation enthusiast, it saddens me to encounter quiet or neglected airports. This has driven me to a personal mission: to elevate the potential of airports to every community leader and elected official.

In this whitepaper, you will discover research that challenges common misconceptions about the functionality and utility of airports. My goal is to emphasize the untapped opportunities by further developing your community's airport and aviation culture. Left unattended, an airport is merely a place, but when nurtured, it can become a pivotal asset in local and regional economic development plans.

This whitepaper provides practical strategies for engaging local aviators, business owners, airport managers, and commissioners. By leveraging the unique advantages of rural airports, we can spark economic growth, create jobs, and enhance the quality of life in our communities.

I hope this whitepaper inspires you to see the potential in your local airports and take action to transform them into vibrant hubs of economic activity. It should serve as a resource, inspiring and guiding your efforts to harness the aviation boom we are experiencing. Together, we can pave the way for prosperous and resilient communities.

May fair weather and sunny skies guide you on this adventure.

Best,



Ron Kresha • Golden Shovel Agency, CFO • Flight Instructor, and Cirrus Standard Instructor Pilot (CSIP)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ron received his private pilot's license at 20 and pursued aviation in college, hoping to fly for the airlines. However, marriage, family, and life presented a different path: teaching high school English in rural Minnesota.

After teaching for 12 years, Ron formed an online learning company with 10 other partners. Growing a business in rural Minnesota demonstrated the potential of rural economies. By leveraging the strength of the rural workforce and broadband access, he was able to pioneer an online company successfully.

This business experience led Ron to co-found Golden Shovel Agency, which helps communities tell their stories and build awareness. He is profoundly dedicated to rural communities and the economic possibilities of a rural resurgence.

As a pilot and economic development enthusiast, writing this research whitepaper was a natural extension of all Ron's passions. Because of his travels to communities through aviation, he understands the untapped potential of the community airport.

Ron Kresha, CFO and founding member of Golden Shovel Agency, is dedicated to equipping communities with the tools needed for economic success. A serial entrepreneur proud of his resilience, Ron manages financial operations, analyzes economic trends, and drives unique projects. He thrives on connecting with people and understanding community challenges. Based in Little Falls, MN, Ron enjoys crafting wooden games and piloting aircraft in his free time. He values the opportunity to support community leaders and contribute to their success stories.



INTRODUCTION

Aviation captivates our imaginations with thrilling stories and dramatic portrayals in the media. For many, this fascination began with television shows like *Black Sheep Squadron*, where the daring missions of US Major Gregory “Pappy” Boyington and his squadron brought us into the cockpit of Corsairs flying over the Pacific Ocean. These WWII stories came to life in our living rooms, but the local airport always seemed distant and unreachable.

In many towns, the sound of planes arriving and departing is familiar, and the airport beacon flashes at night. Yet, the idea of becoming a pilot feels out of reach, and few consider visiting the airport. The flying men and women appear poised, professional, and remarkably cool. However, for many young people without aviation connections, entering the aviation industry seems like an insurmountable challenge.

Today, advancements in technology, education, and the need for a skilled workforce have removed these obstacles. The aviation industry is booming with opportunities for economic growth and workforce development. Every job in aviation needs quality people who offer competitive wages and benefits. Now is the time for communities to rethink their relationship with local airports and the aviation industry.

BRIDGING THE GAP

The goal of this whitepaper is clear: to dismantle the myths surrounding airports and aviation, help communities leverage their airports, and welcome new talent into the industry. Airport culture is vibrant and engaging. Instructors, students, and general aviation pilots often share stories and discuss weather forecasts, cross-country flights, upcoming pancake fly-ins, airplane maintenance, and restoration projects in the airport lobby. But beyond these conversations lies a powerful economic engine. Aviators earn a living and frequently spend money in the aviation sector, fueling the community with transportation options, small businesses, potential investments, and economic growth.

