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FBOs AND THE DRIVE TO BE THE BEST

By Kirstie Pickering

Selecting the right FBO can make or break a successful private jet arrival and departure. Business Aviation Magazine speaks to four highly rated US FBOs about what it takes to be the best.

APP JET CENTER

Established in 2009, APP Jet Center is an aviation company operating airport real estate and FBOs at Florida's Treasure Coast International Airport, Hayward Executive Airport in California and Virginia's Manassas Regional Airport. It also owns and operates 65,000ft² of aircraft hangars at Denver's Centennial Airport.

APP Jet Center is no stranger to accolades. In 2013, it became the first FBO in the US to complete NATA's Safety 1st Ground Audit program, achieved Stage 1 IS-BAH status in 2017 to 2018, and even had its Manassas FBO being named the best in the world for line service in 2018. What does it take to maintain this level of success?

"Our consistency is a major selling point," says Chris Hambleton, Vice President of Operations at APP Jet Center. "We work hard to be at least as good and as safe as we were the day before. Additionally, we recognise talent within our team and foster it to manage our client relationships and maintain our consistently top-notch operations. As a continually adapting organisation, we do not shy away from the costs and effort we need to put forth in order to grow.





“As a continually adapting organization, we do not shy away from the costs and effort we need to put forth in order to grow.”
Chris Hambleton, Vice President of Operations, APP Jet Center

These unique selling points enable us to deliver excellence and value to our customers.”

With more than 350 tenants across the company’s locations, APP Jet Center is always busy. In Manassas, for example, it fuels approximately 1,500 aircraft every month. Overall, APP Jet Center handles an average of 750 transient aircraft per month.

“Our locations are strategically located in busy markets but at less crowded, general aviation or corporate airports than the nearby larger mainstream airports,” says Hambleton.

“This allows us to offer lower operating costs and convenient ground distances to our clients’ destinations. For example, at our Manassas and Hayward FBOs, our clients enjoy friendly, professional services while avoiding the congestion and high pricing at nearby Washington Dulles and Oakland International Airports.

“In a diversified FBO such as ours where there is a combination of fuel services and property leasing, the more successful operations are, from a client’s perspective, the stronger the tenant relationships grow. This enables them, in turn, to evolve further opportunities,” he adds.

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MILLION AIR

Million Air was founded in 1984 by the Mary Kay Cosmetics family as a single site FBO located in Dallas, Texas. It has evolved into a business with 31 FBOs situated around the world including sites in China, Colombia and Canada. The majority of its FBOs remain in the US, with Million Air Dallas consistently being voted the best FBO in the city.

“Our people are the heart and soul of the Million Air operation,” says Roger Woolsey, CEO at Million Air. “The first step is to hire extremely talented individuals. We don’t hire a resume. We create a career and then inspire and empower our employees. They go on to create that customer magic for pilots, owners and guests that travel in and out of our facilities for their business and family journeys.”

Million Air has a combination of business centric and destination location FBOs. The company handles over 100,000 aircraft a year under the Million Air brand and prides itself in being available to customers 365 days per year.

Million Air White Plains recently had a complete renovation, which includes the installation of six fireplaces throughout the facility. The company is now implementing fully fitted Starbucks outlets with baristas into its newer locations, with beverages and snacks complementary to all customers.

“Million Air is a place our customers can call home and we are proud of having a legacy that continuously exceeds our customers’ expectations,” comments Lauren Rones-Payne, White Plains General Manager at Million Air. “I am most proud of our team and consistently amazed by their dedication to living the Million Air brand. Our team members are proud to wear the Million Air logo and carry that pride into their roles each and every day.”

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Lauren Rones-Payne, White Plains General Manager, Million Air



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STUART JET CENTER

Stuart Jet Center is a long-time independent FBO that has been family owned and operated for more than 40 years. The company offers a full range of specialised services at its facility at Witham Field in Stuart, Florida. A private executive office space, hangars that accommodate Global 8000/G-650 class aircraft, and an executive terminal with state-of-the-art amenities including conference rooms, a customer lounge, crew lounge, and sleep rooms, are just some of its offerings.

In 2019, Stuart Jet Center was voted the best FBO in line service, and number three FBO in customer service, in the country. Such prestigious accolades aren't easy to obtain, and the company is proud of its achievements to date.

“Brilliant customer service means our team members taking great personal pride in their duties to offer the highest quality of services and amenities to all our valued guests,” says Dan Capen, President at Stuart Jet Center.



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Dan Capen, President, Stuart Jet Center

“Our team members excel at treating each other and our customers like family in a friendly, professional atmosphere. It's this personal approach that has enabled us to develop long-term relationships and a reputation for going above and beyond with first-class, red carpet services. At Stuart Jet Center, we're committed to making every guest that walks through the door feel like a VIP.”

The company's busiest period is South Florida's winter season, which runs from October through May.

“With low turnover and a personalised approach to service, the team at Stuart Jet Center knows its customers on a first-name basis. They're more than just a number coming through our door and they feel that difference, which is why they continue to return to us time and time again,” adds Capen.





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MCKINNEY AIR CENTER

McKinney Air Center at McKinney National Airport was voted the best FBO in the US in the 2018 Pilots' Choice Awards for the third year running. The company prides itself in its service, staff and location as the airport is positioned on the fringe of the Class B airspace, meaning it is easy for pilots to fly in and out.

"It all starts with hiring the best people," says Ken Carley, Airport Director at McKinney National Airport. "Once we have the right people in the organisation, we maximise attention to detail with a focus on safety and service. We love making McKinney the only choice for all your aviation needs. Additionally, we offer flexibility in the form of before and after hours for those flights that need service outside of our normal operating hours."

The airport is on track to exceed well over 160,000 operations this year, with approximately 1,000 private jet arrivals and departures taking place per month from the FBO. The busiest period for McKinney Jet Center is typically from May through September each year.

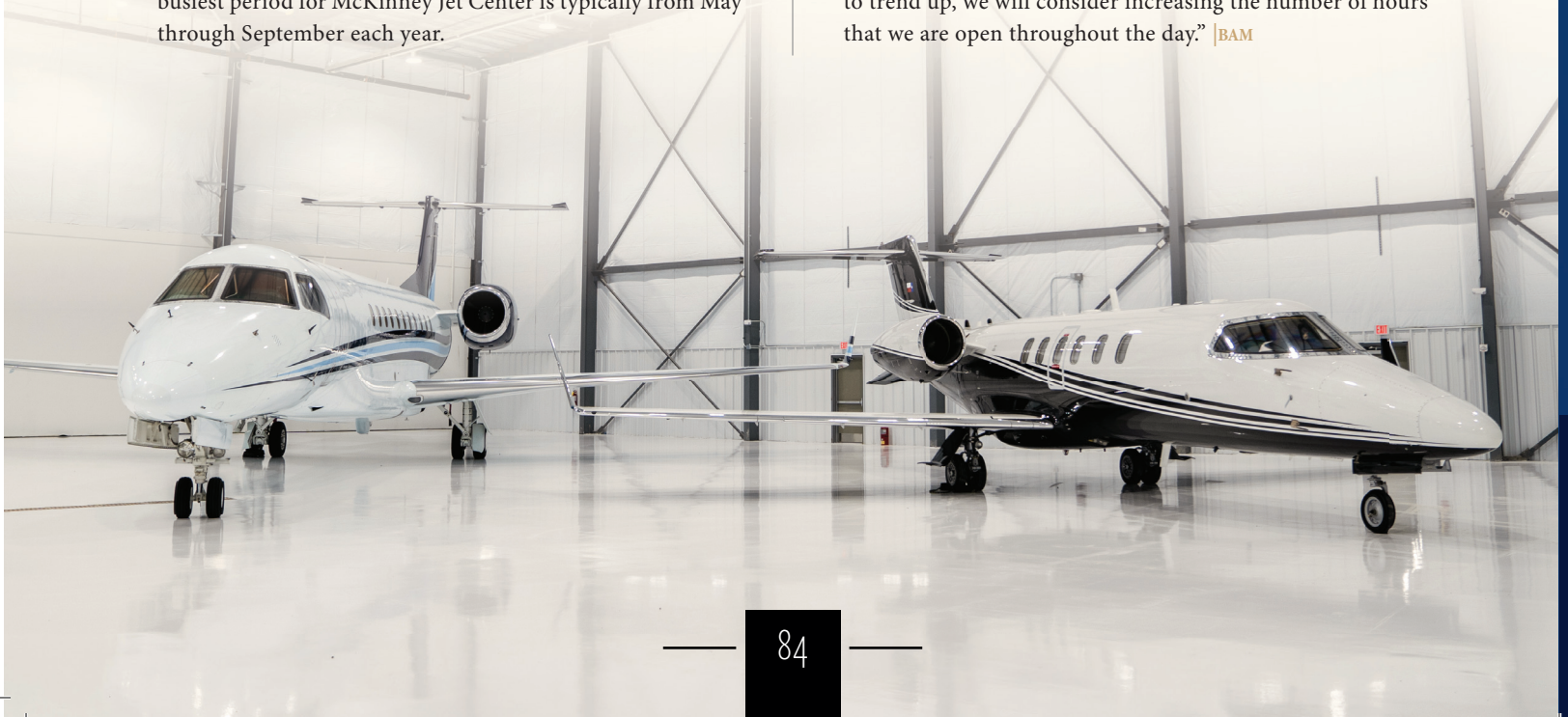
"We are fully prepared to invest in new and additional equipment, facilities, infrastructure and personnel to accommodate the growing demand for such services.

Ken Carley, Airport Director, McKinney National Airport

McKinney is also building on its future, with a new 17,000ft² executive terminal currently under construction. Carley believes these investments are what make the airport stand out from competitors.

"We are fully prepared to invest in new and additional equipment, facilities, infrastructure and personnel to accommodate the growing demand for such services," he says.

"We additionally plan to become more technologically advanced with both our customer reservation system and aircraft tracking. Also, as everything at the airport continues to trend up, we will consider increasing the number of hours that we are open throughout the day." **BAM**



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