

## **PDK Watch Newsletter, February, 2001**

### **PDK Watch Proudly Announces Its New Website**

Please visit the new PDK Watch Website at [www.pdkwatch.org](http://www.pdkwatch.org) for up-to-date and archival information, newsletters, announcements, and communication links. The newsletter RADAR will always be available on the website. PDK Watch will continue to use U.S. Mail to send RADAR to anyone who cannot visit our website.

### **The Threat to Our Community: Regularly Scheduled Service at PDK**

If you do not feel threatened, you should and here's why. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has decided that more runways would provide a quick fix to the current air traffic delay problem. The new administration in Washington, D.C., and Congress are reviewing policies and legislation seeking ways to "streamline" the process of building new runways. The National Air Transportation Association has published a list of the 100 Most Needed Airports, which includes DeKalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK). (See the next article for more information on this report.)

What does the community around PDK have to fear? The introduction of regularly scheduled passenger and/or cargo service at PDK from the spillover of congested traffic at Hartsfield. Flightserv.com, a PDK tenant, says on its website, "Scheduled corporate jets offer the traveling public a new way to travel without encountering the hassle of large airports and the associated long delays, herds of people, and limited service."

Awareness of the incremental changes over the past several decades at PDK substantiates the fear of regularly scheduled service. The history of PDK reveals the evolution of our airport from a small, largely recreational propeller plane airport to what is now a larger, busier, and noisier airport used increasingly by jets.

In response to citizens' requests the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners (BOC) attempted in 1996, 1997, and 1999 to get an ordinance in place that would keep PDK as a general aviation airport, not a commercial airport with regularly scheduled passenger and/or cargo service. The past Chief Executive Officer of the County, Liane Levetan, and her County Attorney, Jonathan Weintraub, with the active support of Airport Directors and the FAA aggressively fought the proposed ordinance and presented a substitute ordinance that encouraged undesirable growth.

CEO Levetan and her staff gave every appearance of trying to use land being purchased with noise abatement buyout funds for airport expansion and in particular of supporting the activity of one individual whose actions are directed toward expansion at PDK.

Here is a summary of this individual's attempts. In March 1996, C. Beverly Lance proposed a development in the 38-acre Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) across Clairmont Road from the airport. Mr. Lance wanted to develop this County-owned land as a for-profit sports activity center. His plan for this development was shown on a drawing prepared by the LPA Group, which was under contract to PDK. It was presented to the

Airport Advisory Board without a request for endorsement. The airport director spoke in support of this development at a community meeting. The City Manager of Chamblee, on behalf of the Community Development Director and a councilwoman, wrote a letter of endorsement for Mr. Lance even though this project was not in Chamblee. Mr. Lance informed citizens that it was just a matter of time before someone developed this land. The community was in strong opposition to this proposal, and it was stopped when the BOC would not vote to give Mr. Lance permission to seek rezoning of the land despite a plea from the County Attorney. Currently, efforts are underway to have this land designated as greenspace to continue buffering the community from airport noise and providing greenspace for the community.

Mr. Lance continued his efforts to develop land on and around PDK. It was rumored, apparently with justification, that in 1997 he was attempting to buy residential land outside and adjacent to the airport with the intent of turning it into a "through the fence" operation, a way to bring regularly scheduled service to PDK without the approval of elected officials. This effort failed when some residents refused to sell their property.

Aviation Properties, Inc., with Mr. Lance as executive vice president, leased airport land in October 1996 to build a hangar for "its corporate aviation department," which apparently did not exist. The following year representing himself as "PDK Projects Manager" Mr. Lance solicited tenants for his soon to be built facility.

PDK Properties, Inc., with Mr. Lance as an officer, leased land in July 1997 to build a hotel. In 2000 an investigation under the Georgia Open Records Act revealed the following. No construction had begun on the site. In a letter dated April 22, 1999, Mr. Lance notified the Airport Director that he was in compliance with the lease by stating, "DeKalb County delivered to this firm all required permits to begin construction on April 20, 1999." However, the county development department confirmed that no building, heating, plumbing or electrical permit had been issued. This hotel lease was finally declared in default in September 2000 after the Airport Director was informed of these findings and sixteen months after the default had occurred.

In February 2000 a website advertised positions with a new start up airline operating at PDK Airport. In a phone call to Delta Staffing Services, a wholly owned subsidiary of Delta Air Lines and the company advertising the positions, the caller was told that the new company was "secretive" and a press conference would be held soon. Within a few weeks a press release from flightserv.com with Mr. Lance at the helm announced plans for a new passenger service at PDK.

In a letter responding to Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, CEO Levetan said, "[flightserv.com] is not business based at DeKalb Peachtree Airport." Airport Director Lee Remmel when asked about flightserv.com and PDK Airport claimed no knowledge of its presence at the airport even though flightserv.com was advertising for seats on planes in and out of PDK Airport. Subsequently, a citizen exploring the Globe Building on Airport Road located an office with a flightserv.com sign on the door, took pictures, and presented them to airport staff. A review of the Globe Building lease revealed that the Airport Director must approve subleases.

Under the Georgia Open Records Act it was discovered that while Mr. Lance was establishing flightserv.com, he was seeking the transfer of the lease of the Globe Building to his entity Globe Corporate Center Holdings LLC. The Globe Building was under lease to attorney Edgar A. Neely. In June 1993 Mr. Neely obtained the lease to the Globe Building through a lease assignment without the consent of the BOC. (In August 1993 as CEO Levetan's appointee on the airport cost-benefit study task force, Mr. Neely strongly recommended the study include the benefits of bringing passenger service to PDK.) According to minutes of the BOC business meetings in 1999, Mr. Neely was attempting to secure the consent of the BOC to assign the lease to Globe Corporate Center Holdings LLC when he unfortunately died in a plane crash. The BOC gave their consent for the assignment in October 1999 two months after Mr. Neely's death. Evidence found through open records indicated that one year later the lease assignment had never been completed. There is considerable doubt that this lease is still valid.

Place all of this in the context of the FAA's national airport strategy that indicates a doubling of airport capacity by 2020, and there is justifiable reason for the communities affected by noise of airport operations to feel threatened. However, it is NOT the federal government nor developers that decide how an airport will change, it is our local elected officials. We need to continue our efforts of urging our CEO and commissioners to put in place an ordinance that prohibits regularly scheduled passenger and/or cargo service at PDK. (Look for names and addresses at the end of this newsletter.)

#### Aviation Group Places PDK Airport on Its 100 Most Needed List

The National Air Transportation Association (NATA), a lobbying organization funded by aviation business service providers, has identified America's 100 Most Needed Airports in a report created to promote the growth of the aviation industry. NATA advocates "appropriate intervention" by the federal government (Congress and the FAA) in the operations and regulation of airports, such as DeKalb County-owned PDK Airport.

NATA's report totally ignores the rights of communities or their citizens. It calls curfews, noise restrictions, weight limits and regulations limiting access "arbitrary limitations". NATA considers "organized public opposition" a threat "to the value, growth and prosperity of the aviation system".

NATA's Political Action Committee lobbies to achieve their goals heedless of the impact on communities affected by airports. DeKalb County citizens must continue to remind our elected officials (local, state and federal) that our community has a large stake in the operation of PDK Airport. We pay the taxes, fund the FAA, own the airport, and expect a voice when issues affecting our quality of life are discussed and decided. Use the list at the end of the newsletter to contact our local elected officials.

To view the report go to [www.nata-online.org](http://www.nata-online.org) and click on Government Watchdog.

## New Noise Abatement Officer at PDK

Mario Evans joined the staff at PDK Airport near the end of 2000 as the Noise Abatement Officer. He can be contacted at 770-936-5440.