

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

### Brunswick Executive Is Maine's Oldest New Airport

Brunswick Executive Airport (BXM) opened to much fanfare in April 2011 as Maine's newest public-use airport, but the site near the rugged Maine coast has long been a fixture on the state aviation map, and in the 1920s became the first municipally owned airport in the state. Amelia Earhart gave flying lessons at Brunswick, but it's unlikely she would recognize the airport now, with its two 8,000-by-200-foot runways and a total of more than 650,000 square feet of hangar and maintenance space.



As Naval Air Station Brunswick (NASB), the facility supported U.S. military operations from World War II until the last P3 Orions took off in late 2008. Final NASB disestablishment did not occur until May 31, 2011, but the project to transfer the naval base to a public-use airport began more than six years ago.

"The state of Maine has been very supportive," said Steve Levesque, executive director of the Midcoast Regional Re-

development Authority (MRRA), the entity established by the Maine legislature to manage the development process. MRRA manages BXM as the airport authority and is tasked with redeveloping base properties to create "Brunswick Landing," a science and technology park and center of excellence in advanced technologies that the state hopes will provide high-paying jobs for Maine residents.

## From Military Base to Public-Use Airport: Patience and Perseverance Pay Off for Brunswick Community

Six years and countless hours of dedicated effort after the Federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission voted to shutter Brunswick Naval Air Station, the town of Brunswick, ME and the greater mid-coast Maine region have every right to congratulate themselves on their first-class new public-use general aviation facility (BXM) and business and education campus.

"Brunswick is the most recent success story for having all the right ingredients come together to turn a surplus government property into a great new general aviation airport," said Jeff Gilley, NBAA's director of airports & ground infrastructure. "Strong support at the local and state level and a hard work on the part of a number of individuals in persevering through the lengthy and complicated BRAC process have paid off." According to Gilley, lack of local support at other military bases also scheduled to close at various locations around the country have stymied efforts to keep the valuable airport properties open for public use.

No one is more familiar with the challenges of navigating the re-use process than Steve Levesque, executive director of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA), who has steered the effort to keep the base airport open since the Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority (BLRA – the precursor to MRRA) was established and recognized by the Department of Defense in late 2005. The BLRA was responsible for preparing the reuse master plan for the naval air station, and was fortunate to have strong support from the local Brunswick community, the state of Maine, and the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Our biggest challenge was timing and getting through the BRAC process," said Levesque. BLRA was required to contact state and local agencies, governments and not-for-profits – any entity that had a stake in the outcome as well as organizations that provide or want to provide programs or services on the base.

Enlisting the support of the local community was also key, and through a series of 18 public visioning sessions and many other opportunities for the community and region to weigh in on the reuse development process, the public mandate was



Captain William Fitzgerald, commanding officer of the former Brunswick Naval Air Station, after landing for the official opening of the new BXM airport, with Steve Levesque, executive director of MRRA.

clear: keep the airport open. "Given a choice of a whole range of land-use options, 87 percent of those who responded to our surveys chose the airport," said Levesque.

Transfer of airport property is an ongoing process, but most of the naval base's 3,300 acres will be public use by the end of 2011. Although aviation assets are the largest single component of the base and MRRA is now the airport authority, the agency is also tasked with managing the transition of all base properties – not just aviation ones – to civilian uses, including the redevelopment of property to attract businesses and create jobs for Maine residents.

"The conveying of surplus property, whereby the federal government can convey former military property to a local airport authority, has a long history dating back to World War II," said NBAA's Gilley. "But the process is a not an easy one. The general and business aviation community nationwide should be encouraged by the success at Brunswick, which is the latest positive example of how the process can result in a win-win for the local, state, and aviation communities."



Above left: The Maine delegation that attended the official BXM airport opening included Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, and Representatives Mike Michaud and Chellie Pingree. Right photo: Right: Some of the more than 250 people who attended the grand opening.

Surveys showed that the Brunswick community, long used to the sound – and economic benefits – of aircraft operations, was overwhelmingly in favor of reopening NASB as a civil facility. “It would cost \$2 billion to replace it today,” said Levesque, who has already successfully wooed Kestrel Aircraft Co. to locate at BXM and FlightLevel Aviation to provide fixed-base operations. Kestrel, led by CEO and chairman Alan Klapmeier, is working on development, certification and manufacture of a composite turboprop aircraft, and expects to create more than 300 high-paying jobs once the company is in full production.

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Both companies will be located in Hangar 6, a nearly 200,000-square-foot, heated, state-of-the-art facility that was constructed in 2004. “After looking at several places around the United States, we were particularly drawn to Brunswick because of the infrastructure already in place at the naval air station, along with a well-qualified work force, including those familiar with composite technology, and a supportive community,” said Klapmeier.

Another BXM asset is that Southern Maine Community College will be opening a campus at Brunswick Landing. The program will feature an aeronautics program based on the technology needs of the local aviation businesses.

Peter Eichleay, president of FlightLevel, is looking forward to getting customs capability on site, as well as newly

published ILS approaches by the end of the year (GPS/LPV approaches should be available sooner). Eichleay is ready to roll out the red carpet for business operators: “We have unlimited first-class, heated hangar and office space that we can offer at very competitive rates,” said Eichleay.

Levesque and Eichleay note that Brunswick Executive is ideally located at the intersection of Casco Bay and midcoast Maine, making the airport an excellent refueling choice for aircraft coming from Europe, as well as a quick-turn tech-stop for aircraft going overseas.

NBAA has been a strong proponent of BXM, and Dean Saucier, NBAA’s northeast regional representative, said that the “whole community and region is excited about the airport.”

According to Saucier, the recently approved state tax exemption on aircraft parts and labor, as well as sales and use tax, should only add to the airport’s attractiveness to business and general aviation operators. “After several attempts to eliminate taxes on parts and maintenance, and an onerous non-resident sales and use tax, we commend Governor Paul LePage on signing the tax exemptions,” he said. “They will greatly benefit the Maine aviation industry and contribute to the growth at Brunswick Executive.”

The opening of any new public-use airport is cause for celebration for all those in general and business aviation, according to Jeff Gilley, NBAA’s director, airports & ground infrastructure. “At a time when localities are not apt to build airports, the managed process of converting a military facility – with the support of the local community – to a public-use airport is the last frontier in getting a new airport,” said Gilley.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For airport advocacy information, see *NBAA Airports Handbook*, [www.nbaa.org/airportshandbook](http://www.nbaa.org/airportshandbook)
- For general airports issues, contact NBAA Director, Airports & Infrastructure Jeff Gilley at [jgilley@nbaa.org](mailto:jgilley@nbaa.org)
- For Northeast regional issues, contact NBAA Regional Representative Dean Saucier at [dsaucier@nbaa.org](mailto:dsaucier@nbaa.org)



## **ABOUT NBAA**

Founded in 1947, the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) is the leading organization for companies that rely on general aviation aircraft to help make their businesses more efficient, productive and successful.