Rockford is the New Nest for Passenger Aviation’s Biggest Birds

Chicago O’Hare International Airport can’t handle the enormous Airbus A380 aircraft that are busy hauling people around the world up to 850 at a time. But that doesn’t mean that A380’s aren’t landing in Illinois.

Just a puddlejumper flight away at Rockford International Airport, a new maintenance and repair facility recently opened specifically designed to handle the massive flying machines. It’s so big it can handle both an A380 and a 747 at the same time. Now there’s a photo op for planespotters.

The doors of the building built by Rubb Building Systems are so big that the manufacturer doesn’t blush to call them “Megadoors.” The interior space is so big that you could tip Chicago’s W Lakeshore Hotel on its side, slide it into the hangar, and still have wiggle room.

If you’d like to see something you’ve probably never seen before, watch the video below of the test of the fire surpression system. The hangar is so big that briefly a rainbow forms inside it.
Whether you're an aviation buff, or someone who watches those “World's Biggest…” shows on cable, you'll enjoy the details of the press release that follows the photo gallery.
Airbus 380 and Boeing 747 MRO side-by-side in America

In June 2016 the Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) will open dual 300’ span hangars built by Rubb Building Systems to be operated by AAR. Strategically located in the Midwest, this advanced MRO facility will employ more than 500 skilled workers.

Chicago Rockford International’s new MRO facility, due for completion in June, will be capable of servicing an Airbus 380 and Boeing 747 at the same time.

“Even an extreme blizzard won’t slow the efficiency of the Rockford MRO,” says Jeff Polsean, Economic Development Manager, Chicago Rockford International Airport. “Now we have overcome severe funding challenges, 500 skilled workers will soon enjoy natural light in ideal working conditions at the 24 hour per day 200,000 square-foot facility, delivered by Rubb Building Systems, operated by AAR.”

Says Dan Roszkowski, president of project’s architectural firm Larson & Darby: “This one-of-a-kind building is truly mammoth as an MRO facility. It’s impressive from the inside and practical for all kinds of repair.”

“RFD’s new facility is changing the business landscape not only the airport ground, but the region,” says Ken Ryan, Director of Business Development and Cargo, Chicago Rockford International Airport.

Joe Scandrola, president of Scandrola Construction, notes that flexibility from the building manufacturer and installer Rubb Building Systems helped project stay on schedule.

The Rockford facility’s two Insulated membrane-clad hangars measure 300 feet long with a 300-foot clear span and 40-foot sidewalls, culminating in a center height of 100 feet. Each structure has five-panel, vertical-lift Assa Abloy Megadoors with pivoting Mullions, allowing for comfortable housing of aircraft as large as the Airbus A380. The hot-dip galvanized steel frame is clad with two-inch-thick Thermohall® Insulated fabric. Maintenance is very low.
The vertical lifting Megadoor with its exceptional seals allow the facility to be climate controlled cost effectively all year round. Complimenting the curved membrane structure, the Megadoor’s translucent fabric will also allow natural light in, creating a great work environment for the technicians, while minimising lighting costs.

The Rockford structure represents a high point in Rubb Buildings Systems history in highly efficient membrane clad commercial aviation hangars. According to Chuck Auger, Rubb USA’s Marketing Manager: “Rockford is a step change in hangar efficiency, also being our largest hangar ever. The proof will become clear with service and repair productivity, as well as energy efficiency.”

Auger adds: “Rubb and Assa Abloy Megadoor have historically worked well together on numerous projects. Rubb's robust frame structure and superior engineering supports even the most enormous Megadoor applications. Though Megadoor (and Rubb) ostensibly seem more costly, in reality the reduced building footprint and eve height, along with energy recovery efficiency, make Megadoor the most cost-effective hangar door option. The quality of Megadoor in combination with Rubb’s superior framing design makes the actual cost of door operations the lowest in the market, thereby saving the customer a lot of money in the long run.”

According to Pierre Varmaloff, Megadoor Sales: “The vertical lifting Megadoors with exceptional seals allow the facility to be climate controlled cost effectively year round. Complimenting the curved membrane structure, our translucent fabric will allow natural light in, contributing to a great work environment for the technicians, while minimizing lighting costs.”

Continues Varmaloff: “MRO design should not be about housing aircraft, but quickly servicing planes to get them back in the air. Megadoors are all about reliability, saving time and money for facility operators, and increasing customer satisfaction. When workers have an optimal environment, this shows up in their work.”

Only months ago, the project seemed destined for postponement due to financial issues amongst governmental authorities. Because the five local banking institutions got together to find a way to fast track a $17M line of credit, the project kept moving forward.

Polesean notes: “The entire project was in jeopardy and could easily have been stopped. Without the banks coming together, we would have been dead in the water. The real winner is the local economy and commercial aviation, having a strategically located high-tech facility. More cargo will be a wonderful additional benefit.”

According to the Illinois Governor’s office, AAR is the largest operator of maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities in the United States. The 200,000 square-foot facility is expected to operate 24 hours a day and will greatly expand the airport’s infrastructure. AAR chose Rockford due to its central geographical location, highly trained workforce, cost effectiveness and access to a robust warehouse and distribution network. Rockford, Illinois is also a hub for aerospace and aviation technology, with Boeing, Woodward, UTC Aerospace Systems and GE Aviation all having facilities nearby. Just down the street Rock Valley College is starting an aviation maintenance technology school, which will train mechanics qualified to work at the facility. Rock Valley College is a publically funded institution, which will provide a highly trained workforce to the MRO facility at an affordable cost of tuition, another benefit to the local economy.