Time flies: The journey of Rockford's jet repair hub

David Storch, CEO of AAR Corp., speaks about the maintenance, repair and overhaul facility announcement Monday, Aug. 18, 2014, at the Chicago Rockford International Airport in Rockford. RRSTAR.COM FILE PHOTO

By Isaac Guerrero
Staff writer

Posted Jul. 13, 2016 at 12:00 PM
Updated at 1:56 PM
11 key dates in the making of Rockford’s aviation maintenance program

Jan. 2012: Mike Dunn is hired to lead Chicago Rockford International Airport and lays out a vision to attract a massive jet repair and service center to the airport in an effort to attract more cargo business.

June 2013: Rock Valley College explores an expansion of its aviation maintenance program via a partnership with Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Spartan College of Aeronautics & Technology. Providing a larger pipeline of aviation mechanics is seen as a critical first step to attracting a jet repair hub at the airport.

Dec. 2013: Talks between Rock Valley and airport leaders grow tense as Spartan College won’t commit to a Rockford expansion. Rock Valley signs a memorandum of understanding with the airport to expand its own aviation maintenance program to serve the workforce needs of a maintenance, repair and overhaul operator — commonly called an MRO — and the region’s aviation and aerospace employers.

Feb. 2014: After months of difficult talks, Rock Valley and airport leaders agree on final terms of a deal that will yield a new, 40,000-square-foot education and training center to accommodate an expansion of the college’s aviation maintenance program.

Aug. 2014: Dunn and AAR Corp. CEO David Storch join a host of dignitaries to announce a plan to build a $40 million MRO to maintain and service jets at the city’s airport. Wood Dale-based AAR signs a 10-year lease with the airport to run the MRO facility.

Oct. 2014: A groundbreaking is held for Rock Valley’s $5.1 million Aviation Career Education Center on Cessna Drive along the midfield of the airport.

Feb. 2015: Rockford City Council approves a $5 million contribution to the MRO project. The Winnebago County Board OKs an $8 million contribution.

July 2015: Construction of the MRO begins.

Sept. 2015: Rock Valley, airport and AAR leaders celebrate the completion of the college’s Aviation Career Education Center with a public open house.

Dec. 2015: Five local banks — Alpine Bank, Northwest Bank, Rockford Bank & Trust, Blackhawk Bank and Byron Bank — extend a $17 million line of credit to the airport to cover the state of Illinois’ $20 million contribution, most of which has yet to come due to a state budget stalemate.

July 2016: Construction of the MRO wraps up.

—Isaac Guerrero