



Aviation Maintenance Training Facility Dream Becomes Reality

WEST MEMPHIS, Ark., November 2, 2016 – A celebration to officially open the newly-constructed FedEx Aviation Technology Center on the campus of Arkansas State University Mid-South culminates six years of planning and development of a world-class aviation maintenance training program closely aligned with the world’s largest express transportation company, FedEx Express.

In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded then Mid-South Community College and its supporters \$3.3 million for an aviation maintenance technology program in West Memphis. At the time, supporters included FedEx Express, Arkansas Northeastern College, Arkansas Delta Training & Education Consortium, the Workforce Investment Board of Eastern Arkansas, and Aviation Repair Technologies of Blytheville. Mid-South Community College’s Aviation Maintenance Technology program was off to a flying start.

The Federal Aviation Administration formally approved Mid-South as an Aviation Maintenance Technician School in January 2011, and FAA officials said the certification feat, accomplished in four months, was one of the fastest start-to-finish accreditation processes. The next month, an anonymous donor contributed an SQ2000 aircraft and engine for student training, and by April, the U.S. Department of Labor had featured Marine veteran Gary Brown of West Memphis, a student in MSCC’s Aviation Maintenance Technology program, in its monthly newsletter with distribution to over 100,000 readers including several in the White House. The program was soaring.

Local businesses played a significant role in making the new program successful. Six months after receiving accreditation from the FAA, Mid-South added its first air-worthy teaching tool for the Aviation Maintenance Technology program, a 1968 Beechcraft Baron twin-engine aircraft sold to the College by local businessman Mel Bearden at a below-market price to assist efforts to train students.

By the end of 2011, the College purchased the land for the facility from Drs. Scott Ferguson and Eddie Bryant, again at a less than market price.

In the fall of 2012, Mid-South received a \$1.5 million grant to construct a facility to house the growing program, and by early spring the following year, the Assisi Foundation of Memphis joined a growing list of supporters of the project awarding the college \$650,000 to help fund the training facility.

Two years later FedEx Express, whose support helped Mid-South Community College establish the FAA-certified Aviation Maintenance Technology training program from its inception, demonstrated its long-term commitment with a donation of \$250,000 to be used towards construction. This contribution was in addition to the donation of the impressive training asset, a Boeing 727 retired from the FedEx fleet, which now flanks the new facility.

“Our entire community is so proud of the FedEx Aviation Technology Center,” said Dr. Debra West, who became chancellor of Arkansas State University Mid-South after its merger with Mid-South Community College in July 2015. “We are exceedingly grateful for all of the partners who helped make our dream a reality in this building. This hangar and the technology available to our students will change lives and shape successful careers, but none of it could have happened without the support of federal, state and local government and that of our private funders and donors.”

“To have a company as respected and globally renowned as FedEx with its name on our campus building is unbelievably powerful for our students and our community. Just imagine what it means to an aviation technology graduate to say he or she received their training from the FedEx Aviation Technology Center less than twenty miles from the headquarters of this global transportation giant.”

“Even though we worked with FedEx on this project, we couldn’t get it done overnight. This dream has been a long time coming, but no doubt its impact on this region will make it well worth the wait,” said Dr. Glen Fenter, president of Mid-South Community College during the time the program and facility were developed. “This is an incredible opportunity for students and their careers. To have this kind of training resource and to have received the training from a program so closely aligned with FedEx is a win-win for students and this entire area.”

“FedEx is pleased to have contributed to ASU Mid-South’s aviation maintenance program and the new facility,” said George Silverman, senior vice president, Technical Operations, FedEx Express. “At FedEx, our aviation maintenance technicians are highly-skilled, valuable team members that keep our aircraft fleet in superb condition. We know there will be a demand in the industry and at FedEx for more qualified technicians in the future as current

technicians retire. We are honored to help advance ASU Mid-South's plans to prepare those future technicians for exciting, rewarding careers."

The first class in the new 22,000 square foot facility began this semester. Nathan Culp from Memphis is starting his third year in the program and plans to graduate in May.

"I was excited to see this building open this fall. Our old area was functional, but cramped. This new facility gives us much more room and allows us to work on two airplanes that had been stored at the airport, because we had no space. This new space seems so professional."

"The center is perfect for our students," said Millard Smith, lead instructor for the program. It allows us to expand our student capacity and maximize the use of our training equipment. Our location right next to the airport provides excitement and inspiration. Our goal is to produce a more capable, confident mechanic who will be preferred by our local and regional employers.

"As our program evolves, the donated 727 will play an increasing role in our hands-on training. Our partnership with FedEx, the FAA and others in the aviation community will help guide our program to better fill the needs of the industry."

Designed by PKM Architects and constructed at a cost of \$3.4 million, the building will offer FAA-certified aviation maintenance training for up to 200 students per semester and includes aircraft hangar space, classrooms, labs and support areas.

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