

# Airport to host LSA Expo

By **NICK MARIANO**

[nick.mariano@register-news](mailto:nick.mariano@register-news)

Mt. VERNON — With more aviation vendors signed up than ever before, including one of the best well-known aircraft manufacturers in the nation, and a barrage of people seeking information on a daily basis, the Plane & Pilot Midwest LSA Expo at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport could well be on its way to a record year, expo organizers said Monday.

Now in its fourth year, the expo for light sport aircraft typically draws about 1,000 people from across the country, including airplane manufacturers, ancillary service providers and potential buyers, Airport General Manager Chris Collins said. His airport board members, and members of the Midwest LSA Committee who help plan the three-day event, hope between 1,500 and 2,000 people attend this year, he said. Collins is also president of the LSA Committee.

“Some of the barometers that makes us think we may obtain that is the Web site was hit (more than) 2,300 times between July 22 and Aug. 22. And, we have people already registered from California and

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Maryland and all points in between, plus we get phone calls daily asking about camping and logistics,” Collins said.

Light sport aviation is a relatively new area of aviation that is gaining popularity, Collins said. The LSA Expo as of this year is one of two of its kind in the nation, though a third will open for the first time in January. The first expo was held in Florida eight years ago. Light sport planes are smaller aircraft limited to a gross weight of 1,260 pounds and a maximum speed of 120 knots. The planes are less expensive than their larger counterparts and are well suited for beginning pilots. Licensing is also far less expensive.

Collins noted that members of the committee recognized the potential of growth in the field when they came together to plan the first expo and have worked to continue to expand it for both the development of the publicly-funded airport, the city and the surrounding area. With most of those participating or attending the event coming from outside the area, they bring

with them money to spend.

This year, 38 vendors will be at the show, an increase of eight over the previous high. Those vendors include the Cessna Aircraft Co., a manufacturer the organizers have been pursuing since the expo’s first show, said LSA Committee member Bonnie Jerdon. Other members of the LSA Committee include representatives from the Mt. Vernon Chamber of Commerce, the Jefferson County Development Corporation and volunteers with an interest in the airport including pilots, other aviation officials and representatives of businesses at the airport.

Jerdon, who also serves as tourism director for the city, said the impact on the local economy is significant. Using the Illinois Bureau of Tourism state average of \$125 a day spent by visitors to the state, each attendee of the expo is estimated to spend roughly \$400 during their three-day stay.

“It’s an event that has a very positive impact for us,” she said. “The expo has a really good reputation and people like it here, the vendors like it here. They like the location and it’s pretty low cost for them.”

Another advantage of having the expo here is the opportunity to pitch the area to manufacturers who might be looking to relocate.

A new feature of this year’s expo is a partnership with one of the local sponsors, Project Resources IT, which will manage a variety of text and e-mail alerts to attendees who pre-registered for the expo to announce upcoming events and prize winnings from “hourly” raffles. Collins added that another advantage for the partnership is the opportunity provided to local businesses to advertise through the alerts.

While attendance projections are optimistic, Collins admitted a need to increase local attendance. As a result, ticket prices have been lowered to \$5 from \$8 for the entire three days of the expo, which runs Sept. 6-8 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pre-registration is available at [www.midwestlsaexpo.com](http://www.midwestlsaexpo.com) but is not required. Tickets will be sold at the expo, Collins said.

“Some of the reasons for doing this show is to get people into aviation. We want to get people locally to attend,” Collins said.

Proceeds of the expo go toward covering the cost of the

show, estimated to be \$17,000. Exhibitor fees and sponsorships are also used to cover costs.

The potential of growth, Collins said, adds to the importance of having more local volunteers without whom the expo could not operate. While volunteers will be responsible for a variety of tasks, perhaps the most important role they will serve is as ambassadors of the area. The airport is looking for 25 to 30 volunteers a day.

“What I like to say is this is a chance for someone to be an ambassador for the community because what the jobs entail are mostly checking on the exhibitors and letting them know we’re really appreciative of them being here,” Collins said. “It’s a really easy thing to. What you are basically there for is to say ‘Welcome to Mt. Vernon. What can we do for you?’”

Collins said those wanting to volunteer only need to attend one of two 30-minute training class beginning at 6 p.m. on Sept. 4 and 5. The classes will be conducted in the lobby of the terminal at the airport. In the alternative, those interested in volunteering can also call the airport at 618-242-7016.