

Airport report

Improving Concessions at MSY

By Iftikhar Ahmad
Director of Aviation

On our path to transforming the airport into a business that closely reflects the aspirations of our community, we have discussed many initiatives with you in these reports. One such initiative is upgrading the concessions at the airport. Over the years, the airport has received feedback that the food and beverage contractors could do much better in serving the needs of our passengers.

To make improvements, we were faced with two challenges. First, there was an existing agreement on food and beverage contracts that had allowed the contract to last until 2018. Second, we needed to make significant upgrades in a very short time to be ready for Super Bowl 2013. While we are planning for a world class airport infrastructure and hope to make recommendations on a future new terminal next year, we did not believe that our community would be willing to wait to see such upgrades until we had made those decisions. We felt that we must revamp our concessions now. With that sense of urgency and balancing it with the stated existing conditions, we engaged in robust negotiations to overhaul concessions at the airport.

I am pleased to report that the New Orleans Aviation Board has been able to negotiate very favorable agreements for our passengers that will bring new food and beverage choices as well as new retail concessions to the airport. Together, we have secured a promise of more than ten million dollars of investments by our concessionaires for renovations of their stores in the airport; received a commitment to lower prices and to have all of their shops renovated before Super Bowl; and to do what is necessary to enhance their customer service.

Regarding our first agreement on the food and beverage side, Armstrong Airport Concessions Joint Venture will bring well-known local brands to the airport such as Copeland's Restaurant, Dooky Chase Restaurant, Wow Café & Wingery, Zatarain's, Ye Olde College Inn and Abita Beer Bar that will supplement other great selections and concepts. Some vendors from the previous agreement will remain in the airport such as P.J.'s, Popeyes Chicken and Biscuit and Lucky Dogs to name a few. Dooky Chase will be the anchor restaurant replacing Acme Oyster House. The second agreement is an improved news and gifts

program. On the news and gifts side, New Orleans Air Ventures will be renovating all shops including the Creole Kitchen retail shop, adding a new Saints Store that will offer New Orleans Saints gear to devoted fans while installing a variety of new store concepts in the terminal.

The deadline for the finished construction on all of the stores is no later than January 15, 2013, just in time for the Super Bowl XLVII. This construction deadline will coincide with the scheduled final completion date of the \$300 million airport capital improvement modernization presently underway at Armstrong International.

In terms of ensuring that the new shops and concepts come with great customer service, the airport will follow a "trust but verify" rule. We will be implementing a "Secret Shopper" program. This program, often referred to as mystery shopping, is used throughout the United States to evaluate and measure the quality of service or compliance to regulation or to gather specific information about products and services. Secret Shoppers perform specific tasks such as purchasing a product, asking questions, registering complaints and then providing detailed reports or feedback about their shopping experience for review. Their reports will be shared with the Aviation Board, Master Concessionaire and vendor management to help them properly evaluate the operation of their store.

The Aviation Board and staff are working to improve the airport from the terminal front door to the passenger loading bridge and everywhere in between. When all of the construction is completed and our new concessionaires are operating, we feel we will have a facility our communities will be proud to call their own. ✈



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