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## Cover Story - November 2006

### England Airpark

*New construction takes off at Alexandria airport*

*By Angelle Bergeron*

Jon Grafton, executive director of England Airpark & Community, home of Alexandria International Airport, said airports are never completed.

He should know. Grafton said that the master plan to transform the former England Air Force Base into an intermodal transportation facility and community calls for construction for the next 10 to 15 years at both the airport and the park in which it resides.

In 1991, when the Base Realignment and Closure Commission in Washington, D.C., voted to close England AFB and to downsize and realign Fort Polk, the community formed an economic development agency to ensure the property's viability.

"We presently have under lease more than 1 million sq. ft. of commercial space, 300 units of occupied housing, an elementary school, hospital, golf course, international airport and about 60 commercial businesses onsite," Grafton said. In July, Union Tank Car opened its new, \$100 million rail manufacturing plant that was built by Shaw Construction of Baton Rouge, he added.

Management is expected to soon award a contract for construction of a 60,000-sq.-ft. building in the airpark.

The most recent series of airport-related projects within the Airpark address capacity and safety issues, Grafton said. Ratcliff Construction of Alexandria is putting the finishing touches on a \$24 million project the company began in May 2004 to construct a new passenger terminal and control tower.

"When we started offering commercial air flights in 1996, we were working from a terminal that was 11,000 sq. ft.," Grafton said. "The new facility is almost 80,000 sq. ft."

McKnight/ACC Construction of Augusta, Ga., is working on an \$11.2 million contract to

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construct a military passenger processing facility. Kiewit Southern of Fort Worth, Texas, won the \$21.7 million contract to build an aircraft parking ramp for the facility.

"Both the ramp area and passenger processing facility are military-related projects supporting operations at Fort Polk," Grafton said. In addition to expanding the airport's capability to handle military needs, the projects "provide us with the best platform in the Gulf South to provide relief supplies in the Gulf Coast area in case of future storms," he added.

Grafton said the footage people saw on CNN of Coast Guard helicopters picking people off the roofs of their houses in the wake of Hurricane Katrina showed helicopters that came from the airport, which he called "a key location for sending relief supplies down to south Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi."

In another project, Townsco Contracting Co. of Oklahoma City recently finished construction of a \$9 million, 4,300-ft.-long taxiway.

"Our contract began Aug. 1, 2005, and then Katrina and Rita took all of our equipment," said Steve Byrd, superintendent and quality control for Townsco. "Everybody went south to haul trash, where they could make more than they were making here. Hauling dirt for fill took us four and six months to do what should have taken about two weeks because we didn't have any trucks."

The extenuating circumstances of last year's hurricane season won the contractor an extension, but obtaining sufficient labor, equipment and materials remained a challenge throughout the project, Byrd added.

"If we hadn't picked up that apron job, I don't know what we would have done," said Byrd, referring to an additional, \$6 million contract for construction of a parking apron that Townsco began July 1. The apron will serve the new commercial passenger terminal constructed by Ratcliff and will be complete this November.

"The apron is about 26,000 sq. yds., roughly 700 by 365 ft.," Byrd said. The most interesting aspect of the apron is the part most people will never see or think about, the drainage system Townsco constructed 8 ft. below the concrete surface. The system meets the latest FAA environmental requirements for aprons, he added.

"The drain system is set up with drain grates," Byrd said. "Water runs into a gutter, then an 18-in. pipe, which Ts into a 42-in. pipe. In the middle of the apron, to the side of the big pipe is a French drain."

The French drain is basically a perforated pipe wrapped in aggregate and provides additional filtering for water that leaks into the system through concrete joints. Collected water will feed into an oil and water separator tank, which will be cleaned out periodically by airport maintenance.

"This drainage system is a new twist," Byrd said. To install the system, Townsco hired Progressive Construction Co. of Alexandria.

Townsco demolished existing concrete, treated 12 in. of soil with soil cement, then placed 8 in. of crushed aggregate base and 6 in. of econcrete.

"We had to set up a batch plant and we've got clean, limestone aggregate coming in from Missouri," Byrd said.

"We've got a lean mix specification with 290 lbs of cement mixed with 1 in. rock aggregate." The whole thing is topped off with 14 in. of a final mix with a 650 flexural strength at 28 days.

Weather also brought some problems to the Townsco project.

"We lost a month in July due to the rain," Byrd said. "Here you have sandy soils deposited from the Red River. If it rains one day, you're a week before you can dry out to get equipment back in here."

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