

Desert Jet's Newest Palm Springs Facility Sets the Bar High

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[Christina Basken](#)



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Amidst a global pandemic, Desert Jet looked to the future in July 2019 with the completion of their newly remodeled, state-of-the-art FBO in Thermal, California.

This was the first new construction the Jacqueline Cochran Airport had seen in 25-plus years, featuring an air-conditioned 32,500 square-foot maintenance hangar.

Desert Jet is a full-service Fixed-Base Operator (FBO) offering ground handling, ramp parking, fuel, hangar storage and maintenance service. This is the first and only FBO in the Palm Springs area to have an FAA-certified Part 145 repair station making it a one-stop shop for clientele.

“We moved into the brand-new facility in late 2019 and so we had to hold off on any kind of formal celebration, but we operated nonetheless and continue to see tremendous growth since our opening,” said Chris Little, Desert Jet chief marketing officer.

Adapting to a Post-COVID World

In any FBO construction project, being able to anticipate client's needs and adapting to an ever-changing industry is crucial, but especially in a post-pandemic world. As Desert Jet worked to better prepare their building for clientele, they created a touchless experience throughout the entire facility for customers.

“Their entire visit is touchless if that's desired by them; We have hands-free, motion-sensored doors – So as soon as you come into our facility, you don't have to open a door – All of our restroom facilities, whether it be the toilets, the sinks, the paper towels, everything is hands-free and motion-sensored,” said Jared Fox, Desert Jet CEO. “They can even cash out at the front desk without having to touch anything besides handing us their own credit cards – digital signatures, we can email receipts – everything that they need to get access to is hands-free in the facility.”

Fox said the facility's technology and software is what truly sets it apart from other FBOs.

“Our trucks are wireless, and we have TCS meters and we're actually getting all new trucks that will be completely paperless. For our [part-] 145 operations, our scheduling software [Corridor and PRISM] is all cloud-based, all of the software and everything that we do allowed us to go remote during the pandemic, and then now allows us and our employees to either work from home or work hybrid, where they come in a few days of the week and work from alternative locations at other times,” Fox said. “The building itself too is very environmentally sound with LED lighting and every room in every office in every part of the building and hangar has motion-sensored lighting that turns off when people exit and has real power-saving capabilities.”

While Desert Jet put a lot of work into creating an architecturally pleasing space trimmed with features to enhance the clientele's stay, Fox said what matters the most is the customer service because that's what keeps existing and new clients coming back.

“The building is what catches a lot of eyes from the runway and may even be what creates an opportunity for us to service new guests, but what keeps them coming back is our white-glove service and attention to detail and to support service,” Fox said. “*How* we deliver our product and deliver our service is really where we focus.”



According to Little, Desert Jet Center is rated No. 1 in the Palm Springs area.

“Our line service team is ranked number three in the entire Americas from an FBO survey taken by people who utilize FBO service, including travelers, pilots, aircraft owners, passengers, customers, other operators and vendors,” said Little. “Being an independent FBO at a seasonal destination, we're pretty excited for that news to be recognized.”

Community-Focused

In large part, the high success rate of the new facility comes from Desert Jet's commitment to involve the community in airport-related operations and educating the community on the general aviation industry.

“We like to open up our facility, whether it be to other local businesses, hosting events in our hangar, opportunities for air shows and those types of things,” Fox said. “What I think we're the most proud of is the shadowing program that we work with, the local high school programs, to bring high school students in to see the beautiful facility, but to understand what happens at an FBO, introduce them to general and private aviation, and hope that we stimulate some interest. Not that everybody needs to become a professional pilot or ultimately work at an FBO, but that it gives them an understanding of what's out there. You just never know what is going to inspire a young boy or a girl”

Another unique area in which the FBO supports the local community is through their rotating art series.

“We work with local artists, and we provide essentially all of our walls like a museum, or a gallery would do and it creates fantastic exposure to them,” Fox said. “Our clients love it because every quarter we have beautiful new art that comes in. The majority of that art is for sale, with portions of proceeds going to some of the aviation nonprofits that Desert Jet works with. We have 40-foot vaulted ceilings with an all-glass lobby, and so it really just makes for just an absolute beautiful environment.”



Desert Jet works with local artists to feature their work throughout the facility in the FBO's rotating art series.

Future Growth

“As proud as we are of the physical building, the service that we're delivering and the feedback we're getting from clients, whether that be passengers in the aircraft, pilots, maintenance companies that come out; we really get fantastic, positive feedback that they enjoy working with all team members at Desert Jet,” Little said.

With the combination of the eye-catching new facility, great customer service, and advertising by word-of-mouth, the FBO reached its maximum capacity. To accommodate the demand Fox said they are currently working on building additional hangars and acquiring land.

“We did over a million gallons of fuel last year in the last 12 months and we see approximately 40% of the airport volume here on the field. The Thermal airport has more general aviation traffic than the Palm Springs airport, Bermuda Dunes airports, and the other airports in the area,” Fox said. “The current operational number trajectory shows that by 2026, the Thermal airport will have more traffic as a whole than the Palm Springs airport. That includes everything; commercial, GA, private, military, all of it. So, the current trajectory and the growth of the Jacqueline Cochran Thermal Airport is tremendous.”

Fox said another reason why the Desert Jet Center has been so successful in its growth is because of their willingness to be flexible and adapt.

“You can't rest on your laurels. The industry is constantly changing, and you have to be able to adjust as the different clientele comes in,” He said. “A passenger on a shared seat airplane is a different type of customer than, say, an aircraft owner who's flying the airplane themselves, or is coming in on a G650. So, you really have to be able to adjust on the fly and make constant improvements as the industry and the needs evolve.” In addition to expanding hangar space, the FBO is also looking into installing solar panels.

“Being in the desert with that much of an opportunity, our goal is to be able to go completely solar-powered and power our building, even if we build enough solar power here on the airport to help generate power for the rest of the airport,” Fox said.

Fox said his best advice to other FBOs thinking about enhancing their infrastructure, is to consider how functional their airport is currently and how they can improve in regard to solar-powered energy, proper lighting, wi-fi, and internet accessibility.

“Especially as you design a building, it seems like no matter how much time you put into it, there's always a chance as it gets built, you go, ‘Oh, I wish we would've done something slightly different.’ But I think ... it's a little unique maybe to us in our location, I think solar power is something that I would take a strong look at, depending on the location of where you're at. Lighting I think is very important for ramps and for the airports. Obviously high-power Wi-Fi, I think, is imperative to make sure that customers can get on and have very high-speed internet accessibility,” Fox said.

“You want it to be efficient in every possible way, from the customer experience to being energy efficient, and to making it easy for your employees,” Little added. “So, all around, you got to think about every aspect of what you're creating, as opposed to just constructing a building and making it look nice. You also have to make it efficient and functional.”