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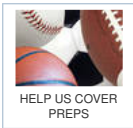
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# Deseret News

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## Officials hope new airport will bring economic boon to St. George

By **Alex Cabrero**, Deseret News

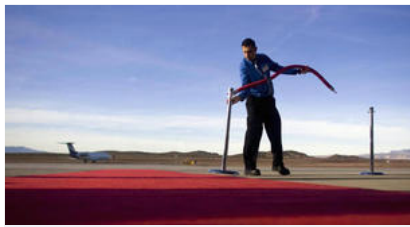
Published: Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2011 5:54 p.m. MST

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ST. GEORGE — St. George is celebrating what it hopes will be the beginning of a new era of economic expansion. The city's new airport opened Wednesday.

This airport has been in the planning stages for about 20 years and a lot of people wondered if it was ever going to get off the ground, especially in the current economic downturn. But the airport is now open and ready for business.



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Samantha Clemens, The Spectrum

Carlos Robles, project manager for the new St. George Municipal Airport, fixes a red rope after the inaugural flight's jetwash blew it to the ground at the opening Wednesday, Jan. 12, 2011.

The new St. George Municipal Airport cost roughly \$160 million to build, with \$123 million coming from the federal government. The airport is built about five miles away from St. George in a new area southeast of the city. All that land gives a lot more room for the airport, which used to be on top of a bluff in St. George.

Now more types of jets, like the 737, can land in the southern Utah city. It also means more destinations. Already flights to Los Angeles will begin next month and more cities could soon be connected.

"It's a miracle it really happened, in this day and age, in this kind of an economy, and with this kind of government politics and everything," said St. George Mayor Daniel McArthur. "We're fortunate to be opening the only green field airport in the United States. It's a great day for us."

And a lot of residents wanted to be a part of that day. About 1,000 people came for the grand opening.

The new airport will provide an economic shot in the arm, not just for Washington County, but for the entire region.

Before the official dedication of the airport Wednesday afternoon, several thousand people packed the Dixie Convention Center to hear about the future economic benefits the airport will bring. The expectations are high.

"This is like the next stage for St. George, because now it gives us the opportunity to go after companies that we couldn't go after," said Gary Esplin, St. George city manager.

"It gives us a presence in competitions where we never had a chance before."

The airport is five times larger than the old one. The 9,500-foot runway now makes it possible for jets to fly in and out of St. George, which was impossible at the old airport. That will impact the Salt Lake City International Airport as well as other airports.

Skywest Airlines, based in St. George, has already announced daily jet service to Salt Lake City. Larger capacity planes will bring more tourists, more business people to southern Utah. And in the years ahead, other airlines may put St. George on their schedules.

"So we're looking at that and looking at marketing in the future," McArthur said. "But this is the beginning. Today is a beginning of a whole new future for economic development and travel for our citizens."

The airport will also be a magnet in another way. There are thousands of acres of land surrounding it, ready for commercial development, which is good for Dixie and for the entire state as well.

"It'll all add to the economic growth and expansion that's taking place," Gov. Gary Herbert said. "This is part of the synergism that's taking place all over the state of Utah."

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