

SKYWEST PLAN EXPANDS

Airline doubles size of hangar in Springs

July 29, 2005

By WAYNE HEILMAN THE GAZETTE

SkyWest Airlines' planned maintenance hangar at the Colorado Springs Airport will hold six regional jets at a time, servicing up to 15 a night for overnight work.

Construction on the 124,577-square-foot, \$20 million hangar will begin in the fall and should be completed by fall 2006. The shop will be about 2½ times larger than planned when the carrier announced it last year. When completed, the Springs hangar will be SkyWest's largest maintenance operation among 10 sites outside its headquarters in St. George, Utah, said Ron Reber, Sky-West's executive vice president and chief operating officer.

The airline chose the Springs for the hangar last year over Tucson, Ariz., and Wichita, Kan., Reber said. The shop will perform maintenance on SkyWest's fleet of 50- and 70-seat regional jets.

"Colorado Springs works very well for us as an overnight and heavy-maintenance facility," Reber said. "The growth of this facility since we began planning it is a result of a good work force in the Springs. People want to live there, and the cost of living is right."

In the year since SkyWest opened a much smaller, temporary maintenance operation in the Springs, the carrier has boosted its staff from 30 to more than 100 and could reach 200 within a few years, Reber said. The airline also has 150 pilots and flight attendants based in the Springs.

Maintenance staffers earn between \$30,000 and \$60,000 a year, while flight crews earn between \$25,000 and \$100,000 a year, Reber said.

SkyWest's 219 aircraft typically spend up to three hours at least every four days in overnight maintenance, which can include everything from changing tires to replacing seats and checking a variety of mechanical, electrical and hydraulic parts and systems.

Reber said the company also plans to do annual heavy maintenance on some of its fleet in the Springs, which can take up to three days and often involves removing engines. The amount of work will depend on how many planes SkyWest can route through the Springs, he said.

SkyWest operates nearly 1,500 daily flights on regional jets, including more than 20 to Colorado Springs, under contracts with United Airlines and Delta Air Lines.

"Regional jets are replacing mainline flying," Reber said. "You are getting two to four flights a day on 50-seat regional jets replacing a 130-seat mainline jet that gives the airline the ability to offer the frequency that will stimulate additional traffic."

The new hangar will be on 14 acres southeast of Fountain Boulevard and Aviation Way, on the airport's west side.



Matt Chenoweth of Colorado Springs inspects a United Express jet operated by SkyWest during routine maintenance.



PHOTOS BY DENIS ROCHEFORT, THE GAZETTE - SkyWest Airlines currently maintains aircraft in a hangar at the old Colorado Springs Airport terminal. The carrier, based in St. George, Utah, plans a new, \$20 million, 124,577-square-foot maintenance hangar just south of that hangar.