

Airport wants to become more active in the community

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft Community Airport (BCA) has a new airport manager and he's looking to raise awareness in the community.

'We need to raise awareness. When we spoke with [MP] Mike Bossio and [MPP] Todd Smith they said we have to raise awareness in the community and build a case for the airport,' said Pat Murdock. 'We need to build a brand and create excitement and prove there's a need.'

Murdock said the BCA is looking to expand and become an integral part of the Bancroft community.

'We've got to do something with the town. We've got to create jobs for young people. We think with the airport, airports create jobs,' said Murdock. 'The most important thing that the airport does and can do is providing a facility for emergency services for our community.'

At the pancake breakfast at the airport during Wheels, Water and Wings weekend in Bancroft, building a brand for the airport began with connecting with the community. This year the BCA presented a survey looking to better understand what community members want from their airport. The questionnaires were later drawn for free flights every hour.

There is an interest in flight training, but as a flight club the airport is not equipped to provide training. It is something the BCA would like to pursue, but Murdock said expressing interest and taking initiatives are two different things. Flight training is expensive and there aren't as many government grants or initiatives to get pilots up in the air there used to be.

'It all depends on what the government needs,' said Murdock. 'There's the demand for pilots is increasing exponentially because there are so many older people that are retiring. The other thing is the demand for air travel.'

Cottagers could fly from Toronto to their cottages in Bancroft.

A different option is to develop and expand the airports facilities. The airport has already invested in a better fueling system to speed up the delay of airplanes, especially emergency services aircraft, on the ground. It has also invested in solar panels to help fund the airport. The panels have already paid for themselves, returning both initial investments and interest to the members of the airport who funded them. BCA is mostly run on membership fees and solar power revenues.

Murdock also wants to see the airport runway paved. He said the current gravel laneway can be unattractive to pilots with newer planes.

'When you land on a gravel runway, when you are travelling along the runway and accelerating and adding power, a propeller is swirling around and creating vortices of dust and gravel. That's getting into the propeller and damaging the propeller. It's damaging the paint on the new airplane. We've had lots of occurrences, [people say] we love Bancroft, but we're not going to come in and wreck our plane,' said Murdock.

He added that the more airplanes that could stop in and bunk at the airport, the more the airport could encourage people to participate in local business. Pilots would eat, sleep and take their business to Bancroft.

'I wonder if they're thinking that they're going to have big jets coming in, and that's not going to happen. Where are you going to get 60 to 80 people coming into Bancroft,' said Murdock. 'Let's say we needed when the town flooded a couple of years ago and we would have needed a quick response of 50 soldiers come in to sand bag, we could have a Hercules or a smaller plane come in, then you could have an almost immediate response. That's what we're thinking about here. We cannot see it expanding into commercial, there's no need for it.'

Murdock noted that when speaking of expanding the airport, community members may assume that larger or commercial planes would begin coming to airport. He assured that the goal of expanding the airport is to be better equipped for emergency services and to generate business for the community.

Murdock is also environmentally conscious. He suggested planes are becoming more emissions friendly every day and that the airport is looking to help environmentally in any way it can.

The BCA is interested in developing community interest and hearing from community members.