

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 6

Michael A. Giardino

*Flagler Beach City Manager
Candidate Report*

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Cover Letter and Resume

MICHAEL A. GIARDINO

143 Hollinwell
Williamsburg, VA 23188-7468
(305) 433-1566

May 22, 2023

Colin Baenziger
Colin Baenziger & Associates
2055 South Atlantic Avenue Suite 504
Daytona Beach Shores, FL 32118

Dear Mr. Baenziger:

I received notice from your firm that the City of Flagler Beach, Florida is searching for a City Manager. I would like to apply for the position.

I am an achievement-oriented manager with 37 years of progressively increased leadership experience and 16 solid years of municipal government services leadership experience as an Airport Chief Executive Officer, Village Manager/Treasurer and as second in command of Naval Air Station Key West (NASKW).

Airport Chief Executive Officers are tasked with providing safe, efficient, economical air transportation for the traveling public and promote economic development, trade, and tourism throughout the community. As Executive Director, Peninsula Airport Commission (PAC) (a political sub-division of the Commonwealth of Virginia), I was akin to a city manager, and I completely turned a failed organization around. As Director of Aviation for the County of Monroe and Administrative Director of the Monroe County Airport Authority (MCAA) (an independent public benefit corporation created by the State of New York), I brought prominence and pride back to an airport marred by scandal. Each airport had serious problems; Newport News / Williamsburg International (PHF) faced insolvency, possible commercial air service extinction, and my predecessor was convicted of 22 federal felony counts. I led PHF through the COVID-19 pandemic with no shutdowns. Before my arrival at the Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC), it had faced over two years of scandal. Now, PHF is on an upward trajectory with a \$193M capital improvement plan and ROC was the first winner of a statewide competition awarded \$39.8M toward an aggressive two-year \$79M debt-free capital improvement project to create a 21st Century Airport. It won thirteen awards for improved customer experience, environmental consciousness, and innovative technologies. I recruited new air service/concessions, lowered/stabilized expenses, and restored integrity at both airports.

As Executive Officer in Key West I was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) / Chief of Staff responsible to the Commanding Officer for the safe, efficient employment of 800 employees across a myriad of support services and functions. I was Acting Commanding Officer for eight months. My duties were like a CEO / COO responsible to a Board of Directors. The base is 6,300 acres within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary bordering federal, state, county, city, and private properties surrounded by miles of shoreline. This geography provides unique environmental compliance and compatible land use challenges. Key West is also a diverse cultural community rich in tourism and recreational activities. The base had its own

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sewage treatment plant, 800 on-base housing units, two marinas (one live aboard), over 1,000 government-hotel guest beds, four waterfront recreation areas, 500 recreational vehicle sites, a bowling facility, three gyms, an elementary school, a childcare facility, three fire houses, police with investigative capability, a grocery store, a department store and much more.

At the Village of Brockport, I was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Treasurer/Chief Finance Officer (CFO). I was a sworn finance officer of the State of New York responsible with fiscal conformance using a uniform system of accounts prescribed by the state comptroller and pursuant to New York law. The Village is the home 5,000 residents and the State University of New York SUNY Brockport with a total enrollment of 7,000 students. I administered Brockport Water and Sewer Enterprise and Brockport Fire District funds.

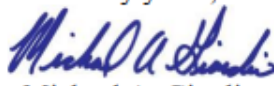
I interact effectively with people from a wide variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. I also have considerable experience working effectively with all types of media. I adhere to the highest ethical standards and held a Confidential, Secret or Top-Secret clearance for over 25 years. I was nationally recognized as "2016 Community Person of the Year" by the Hearing Loss Association of America for work on their Professional Advisory Committee and efforts made at the Rochester airport to install hearing loop technology.

I have operated in challenging environments all over the world. I have planned, developed, created, and adapted strategies that achieved success. Cockpit or Boardroom; military or civilian; on land and at sea; I have been face to face with: the President of the United States, the Secretary General of NATO, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a former United Kingdom Prime Minister, Governors, members of Congress and their staffers. I have achieved positive results from Kabul to Newport News / Williamsburg maintaining the highest ethical standards and personal integrity. I was in the Pentagon on 9/11 and deployed with NATO forces twice to Afghanistan. I am cool and calm under pressure. I am used to challenging circumstances. I fixed NASKW's hurricane evacuation reimbursement program after the failures after WILMA in 2005, ensuring every IKE (2008) evacuee was reimbursed within two weeks of their return. I end failed practices and turn strategic visions into tangible results.

I am collaborative. I encourage teamwork, empowerment, and cross-functional training techniques. I am experienced in working in complex, multijurisdictional geographic areas. I ask for advice and can admit when I am wrong. My door is always open, and I expeditiously answer correspondence. I am experienced in multiple forms of governance.

With my background and interdisciplinary experience, as well as my master's degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College, and a graduate education in Information Technology Management from the Naval Postgraduate School, I am certain I can be a valuable member of the Flagler Beach management team. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,



Michael A. Giardino

More at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-giardino-16450019/>

MICHAEL A. GIARDINO

143 Hollinwell, Williamsburg, VA 23188-7468 (757) 378-2123 (H), (305) 433-1566 (M), E-mail: michaelagiardino@gmail.com

Summary High-energy aviation leader, planner, team builder and communicator with years of sound, effective decision-making and problem-solving experience in complex, demanding environments. Accomplished in guiding diverse organizations to achieve challenging goals, improve organizational performance, and manage scarce financial resources, while providing for individual growth and achievement. Relevant skills include:

- Leadership/Crisis-Emergency Management
- Financial Management
- Business Development
- Human Resource Management
- Government Operations/Program Planning
- Community/Media Relations
- Government Processes & Relations
- Facilities/Environmental Management

Accomplishments

**Leadership/
Crisis-
Emergency
Management
(EM)** Changed cultures/images of ROC/PHF after dishonorable departures of three predecessors (one convicted of 22 felonies). Leading in the aftermath of FAA and State investigations, two civil lawsuits, a federal criminal trial, and a Global Pandemic. Rebranded commercial service airports. Zero major discrepancies at PHF, ROC & NQX during scores of compliance inspections. Immediate Past ACI-NA Small Airport Chair led on legislative and policy issues facing airports.

**Financial
Management/
Business
Development** Increased PHF bottom line \$16M in 5 years. ROC won state competition grant leading to 13 awards for a \$79M debt-free project. Left ROC with nearly zero debt, reduced Residual Airline Fees by 62% & Cost Per Enplanement by 57%. Recruited PHF’s first new commercial service in 8 years and largest ever privately funded airport development project. Secured \$847,000 SCASD Grant.

**Human
Resource
Management** Focused on fostering great culture and taking care of people. Right-sized airport HR budgets (normal and pandemic). Revised police/fire department work schedules saving overtime. Instituted Interest-Based Bargaining Unit team & bi-lingual training. Airports received overdue pay raises from conservative budgets.

**Government
Operations/
Program
Planning** Career of international, federal, state, and local government experience. Conscientious steward of federal and state grants attaining millions in discretionary funds for aging infrastructure. Decades of experience working with government and private concerns to get the job done. Aggressive yet comfortable in competitive federal and state grant funding arena.

**Community
Relations /
Government
Relations** Initiated jet noise monitoring program/mitigation strategy. Hosted two “Blue Angels,” one “Thunderbirds” air shows, numerous 5K events raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for charitable organizations. Frequent radio and TV (local, CNN) guest and print contributor. Aggressive community advocate experienced in Washington, D.C. and state capitals getting things done for localities.

**Facilities
Management** Focused on fun and the “Passenger Experience.” The **inaugural winner** of a New York State-wide competition leading to a \$79M Terminal Revitalization that won 13 awards, including the 2018 (first year) AAAB Innovation Award, for innovation and sustainability. Leader on newest technologies and innovations especially for persons with disabilities. Recognized regionally and nationally by the Hearing Loss Association of America as Community Person of the Year.

More at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-giardino-16450019>

Michael A. Giardino

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Work History

Interim Airport Assistant Director, City of Brownsville KBRO **2023-Present**
Directs, plans, manages, and organizes all functions at Brownsville South Padre Island International Airport.

Executive Director, Peninsula Airport Commission (CEO) KPHF **2017-2023**
Led staff of 90 for six politically appointed Commissioners. Restored tarnished brand and culture. Saved airport from insolvency. Led through COVID-19. \$8M operating budget and \$193M capital plan.

Director of Aviation / Administrative Director (COO/CEO) **2012-2017**
Monroe County, New York / Monroe County Airport Authority
Led a staff of 120 personnel for a 7-member Authority Board and elected County Executive in operating the Greater Rochester International Airport (KROC). Directed and executed \$32M operating budget and \$79M aviation capital improvement project that won 13 awards. Restored integrity.

Village Manager / Treasurer (COO/CFO) Brockport, New York **2011-2012**
Provided most economical/efficient overall direction, coordination and control of the day-to-day activities and operations. CFO prepared, oversaw, and executed Village annual budget.

Executive Officer Naval Air Station Key West KQNX **2007-2011**
Deputy Commander/Naval Aviator. Chief Operating Officer (COO) directed daily operations of 7 annexes, covering 6,300 acres, supporting 39 tenants, 5,500 employees receiving 20,000 visitors per year. \$55M operating budget. Directed 12 department heads and 800 employees.

▪ **Section Head, Special Air Operations, Ramstein, Germany.** **2004-2007**

Director of Air Operations (Kabul) and Lead Planner, Kandahar Afghanistan
Supervised all NATO Allied Command air operations in Afghanistan as Chief of Air Operations. Planned/Designed/Budgeted operations and sustainment of Kandahar multi-national base.

▪ **Operations Analyst Section Head, Chief of Naval Operations Program.** **2001-2004**
Assessments Division, Pentagon, Washington DC

9/11 survivor. Program budget and research analyst for operations and maintenance programs totaling over \$1B. Conducted theoretical, statistical and simulator analyses of complex systems.

▪ **Previous work experience includes:**

U. S. Navy Officer. Top Secret/SCI/SAP clearance. Mishap-free Naval Aviator with over 2,450 flight hours. Credited with 110 helicopter-borne rescues after Hurricane Floyd-awarded the Air Medal. Maintenance Officer responsible for 14 aircraft and 250 personnel executing \$9M budget. Leader of seagoing units flying dangerous missions in harsh environments. Nuclear Weapons Safety Officer.

Education U. S. Naval War College Master of Arts
Naval Postgraduate School Graduated
U. S. Navy Aviation Undergraduate Flight Training Naval Aviator
State University of New York College at Brockport Bachelor of Science

Affiliations Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors (ex-officio)
ACI-NA Small Airports Committee Immediate Past Chair (Two Year Term)
Board of Directors, Virginia Aviation Operators Council (VAOC)
Board Member, Hampton Roads Transportation Organization
Past President, New York State Aviation Management Association (NYAMA)
Certified Member, C.M., American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE)
National/Regional Person of the Year, Hearing Loss Association of America

Section 6

Candidate Introduction

MICHAEL GIARDINO

EDUCATION

Master of Arts, Naval War College
Graduated, Naval Postgraduate School
Bachelor of Science, State University of New York College at Brockport

EXPERIENCE

Airport Executive Management Consultant, Brownsville, TX	2023 – present
Airport Chief Executive Officer, Newport News, VA	2017 – 2023
Airport Chief Executive Officer, Rochester, NY	2012 – 2017
Village Manager/Treasurer, Brockport, NY	2011 – 2012
Executive Officer/Acting Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station Key West, FL	2007 – 2011
NATO HQ Section Head Ramstein, Germany/Chief NATO Air Operations, Kabul Afghanistan/Lead NATO Transition Team Planner, Kandahar, Afghanistan	2004 – 2007
Lead Operations Research Analyst, Pentagon, Washington, DC	2001 – 2004
United States Navy Officer/Naval Aviator	1985 – 2011

BACKGROUND

My diverse career, in and out of the military, is why I will blend the last 16 years together in explaining my background and why I am qualified for the position. As an Airport Chief Executive Officer, Village Manager/Treasurer and as second in command of Naval Air Station Key West (NASKW), I have been an integrator who can focus on the desired outcomes while ensuring minute details get proper attention. Airport Chief Executive Officers (CEO) are tasked with providing safe, efficient, economical air transportation for the traveling public and promoting economic development, trade, and tourism throughout the community. As Executive Director (ED), Peninsula Airport Commission (PAC) (a political sub-division of the Commonwealth of Virginia), I completely turned around a failed organization. As Director of Aviation for the County of Monroe and Administrative Director (AD) of the Monroe County Airport Authority (MCAA) (an independent public benefit corporation created by the State of New York), I brought prominence and pride back to an airport marred by scandal. Each airport had serious problems; Newport News / Williamsburg International (PHF) faced insolvency, possible commercial air service extinction, and my predecessor was convicted of 22 federal felony counts. I led PHF through the COVID-19 pandemic with no shutdowns. The Virginia Peninsula is home to the headquarters of the U.S Army Transportation Command, the U.S. Air Force Air Combat Command, Newport News Shipbuilding, NASA Langley Research Center, Jefferson Laboratories, the U.S. Coast Guard Training Academy, and other major federal employers. The Peninsula also has a significant presence from a wide array of international

MICHAEL GIARDINO

companies such as Cannon, Liebherr Mining, and Smithfield Foods. Before my arrival at the Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC), it had faced over two years of scandal. Rochester is the home of Eastman Kodak Company, Wegmans, and Harris Corporation and the former home of XEROX, Bausch and Lomb, RAGU, and other international companies. In Monroe County, New York (population 750,000) Government, I was third in line for Emergency Management (EM) command structure behind the elected County Executive County and her deputy. Because of my efforts, PHF was on an upward trajectory and ROC was the first winner of a statewide competition awarded \$39.8M toward an aggressive two-year \$79M debt-free capital improvement project to create a 21st Century Airport. It won thirteen awards for improved customer experience, environmental consciousness, and innovative technologies. I recruited new air service and concessions at both airports while lowering or stabilizing expenses. As Executive Officer in Key West I was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) / Chief of Staff responsible to the Commanding Officer for the safe, efficient employment of 800 employees across a myriad of support services and functions. I was Acting Commanding Officer for eight months. My duties were like a City Manager or County Administrator. The base is 6,300 acres within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary bordering federal, state, county, city, and private properties surrounded by miles of shoreline. This geography provides unique environmental compliance and compatible land use challenges. Key West is also a diverse cultural community rich in tourism and recreational activities. The base had its own sewage treatment plant, 800 on-base housing units, two marinas (one live aboard), over 1,000 government-hotel guest beds, four waterfront recreation areas, 500 recreational vehicle sites, a bowling facility, three gyms, an elementary school, a childcare facility, three fire houses, police with investigative capability, a grocery store, a department store and much more. At the Village of Brockport, I did much the same however, as Treasurer, I was a sworn officer of the State of New York and was the chief fiscal officer of the village responsible with fiscal conformance using a uniform system of accounts prescribed by the state comptroller and pursuant to New York law. I administered the Brockport Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds, as the Village ran its own water systems. The systems serve 8,106 residents through 1,761 residential metered connections, also providing water to the faculty and students of both the Brockport Central School District and the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Brockport with its 5,500 undergraduate student population.

The three most significant issues facing my most recent industry are:

- Effects of the COVID Pandemic. The pandemic had the same negative effect on the airline industry as September 11, 2001. Airline passenger traffic nearly ground to a halt in April 2020 and has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic 2019 numbers. Some small airports may never recover. The airports I have been involved with have had to adjust workforce, control other expenses, and mitigate the loss of revenue. One airport was on target to lose \$430,000 each month before bold actions were taken to reduce that number to about \$100,000 per month. While business returned, airlines consolidated service and programmed other efficiencies that has prevented full recovery.

MICHAEL GIARDINO

- Regional Jet Pilot Shortage. Compounding the pandemic-effect, is the lack of commercial service airline pilots. Pilot shortages were being predicted as far back as 2010 when experts forewarned the eventual mandatory retirement of a generation of pilots. To reduce expenses during COVID, airlines offered early retirements that later exacerbated the pending effects of those retirements. Just like with COVID, smaller airports were most affected by the pilot shortages as the smaller regional carriers did not have the inventory of pilots to replace those whom they lost when depleted major airlines recruited the regional pilots to backfill their retirees. The issue remains and 68 airports have less commercial airline service than before. This effects communities who are trying to recruit business and jobs because corporations normally look more favorably on communities with thriving airports and good commercial air service.
- Money for aging infrastructure and the effects of inflation on capital projects. The airports and communities I have served are experiencing the effects of aging infrastructure, limited funding, and rising inflation. Aging infrastructure consumes finite human and financial resources, is less efficient, may not be code compliant, and requires more maintenance. Replacing aging infrastructure is becoming more costly due to inflation.

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

I am in search of a leadership employment opportunity in a quality community where I can make a difference. The challenges facing Flagler Beach are familiar to me and I know I can make a difference.

My management style is collaborative, delegative, and decisive. It is deeply rooted in having the very best decision-making tools and information available. Data is abundant but without proper analysis by intelligent and creative minds, data is useless. Assembling, assessing, mentoring, working, and sharing ideas with (listening to, learning from) bright, talented, and hardworking people has always been the most rewarding part of my professional life. I have collaborated in a myriad of environments, with a vast array of individuals, to achieve great success. I lead and I create leaders. I have been in the cockpit and in the boardroom - time constrained in both. In every role I've attempted to build consensus while encouraging dissenting views to make the best possible decision. If the facts, analysis, environment, or situation dictates, I am confident in my ability to admit when it is time to change course when necessary.

My most recent airport staff presented me with a "home grown" achievement award just out of the blue. We weathered some very hard times, and it was their way of showing appreciation. It is one of my most cherished recognitions. I have rarely had the opportunity to choose the people I work with. I have learned to judge strengths and weaknesses as a leader, manager, administrator

MICHAEL GIARDINO

and even flight instructor. Employees must understand the organization and what is expected of them for success. They must be equipped to do their jobs well and, when able, be allowed to have time for professional development and cross training. A chain of command is essential, but I encourage collaboration. I have fostered individual and organizational growth throughout my career. I set strategy but allow for tactical creativity. I enjoy mentoring and watching people achieve their goals. My former Navy subordinates were selected for senior command positions.

One of the elected officials that hired me called it one of the (if not the) best decisions she ever made. Others would say that I am hard working, full of integrity, loyal, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. Because I worked in airports, there are a few elected officials that would say I am inflexible but that is because they were not familiar with the rules and regulations having to do with airport funding and other state and federal regulations. Those who chose to receive training and accepted my numerous offers to meet and discuss airport governance usually changed their views after a few sessions.

My greatest strength is matching the appropriate resources to a task. Whether it is human or financial capital, I can see the 30,000-foot view and break it into grass roots details. Then, by applying the proper people, tools, and sequence of events, I get the job done. I do this through collaboration, analysis, and task organization. Running a commercial service airport during the pandemic required consensus building, accurate financial forecasting, human resource finesse, political savvy, and bold decision making. The airport went from losing \$430,000 per month to near breakeven per month in just three months.

In terms of weaknesses, I recognize that at times I tend to over explain things. Over time I have learned to choose brevity over longwinded explanations while always leaving my door open for anyone needing clarification and/or assistance with my words.

With an undergraduate degree in meteorology, a pilot's mind, and extensive practical experience in operations research analysis and financial management, I follow the numbers. That said, I believe in intuition, "gut feel," and observation. I pay respect historical data but, I fight the urge to "predict the last storm (or hurricane)" (each event/task/emergency/situation is different). The abundance of data can lead to over analyzing. It is important to assemble team members that are diverse in thought, yet likeminded in goal attainment. Choosing the right metrics is a challenge unto itself. Analytics is a tool, not the answer.

While I consider rescuing 110 people in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd in 1999 my great achievement, my greatest professional accomplishment pertaining to my ability to manage and lead in a municipal government role came at the Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC). At ROC, we won a statewide competition that awarded the airport \$39.8M toward an aggressive two-year \$79M capital improvement project to create a 21st Century Airport. The project incorporated "smart" technologies and numerous access improvements - especially for persons with disabilities. ROC was the program's first awardee, and our grant submission became the hallmark for other airports to emulate. The award allowed completion of a 7-year plan in two

MICHAEL GIARDINO

years while adding an outdoor road canopy delivering customer and community-tailored results - incurring no additional airport debt. The project won 13 awards for innovation, including my Community Person of the Year award from the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA). The project funding was dependent upon an aggressive timeline set by the Governor. It met the deadline.

My biggest failure was to fully shed the troubled history of the Newport News – Williamsburg International Airport. Just as we turned the corner financially and my predecessor was finally brought to trial and convicted of 22 federal felonies, the COVID-19 Pandemic struck. Although the overwhelming choice to right the ship, I never gained the support of the majority municipality's elected officials, appointed commissioners, or their appointed staffs. My methods, strategies, and leadership were lauded by airport experts nation-wide and by the minority (Hampton, VA) city-appointed commissioners but, I never gained the respect of Newport News city officials. I can never know why it did not work, as it was never explained to me so, I will use the experience to ensure I am aligned with the next organization that I serve.

Except for layoffs due to the COVID pandemic, the reasons for terminating the employment of anyone in my charge has been for violations of policies and procedures, unlaw acts, or conduct detrimental to the organization. In every case, careful considerations were made, investigations were conducted, employees were given an opportunity to present contrary evidence, and, in most cases, employees received counseling, remedial training, and were placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) before being terminated. I always showed compassion for employees I had to fire but, I always did what was right for the organization.

The challenges I see facing the City of Flagler Beach are:

- **FISCAL.** The cost of everything is going up. Mandatory minimum wage increases are affecting everyone. It is already difficult for local governments to recruit and retain staff, especially in emergency services. Maintaining a high quality of life standard for residents with adequate staff, that are properly compensated, will be a challenge.
- **PIER RECONSTRUCTION/BEACH EROSION.** All the engineering in the world will not account for the uncertainty of environmental threats. It will take smart people working together to achieve the desired outcomes with respect to the beach and the pier. I believe in human ingenuity, intelligence, and creative thought. I also believe in collaboration and respect when it comes to solving hard problems.
- **UNFUNDED MANDATES.** Whether federal, state, or locally generated, there are commonly unintended consequences to government solutions to problem solving. Strategic planning and thorough analysis should be employed to mitigate the threat and/or creation of unfunded mandates.

MICHAEL GIARDINO

During the first six months my efforts will involve:

- Getting to know staff and what they do. I will pay particular attention to their ideas on how to improve.
- Meeting with City Commission Members to establish our relationships, learn their priorities, as well as their work-methods/communications preferences.
- Introductions with community leaders, neighborhoods, civic organizations establishing those relationships and learning about things that aren't found in meeting minutes.
- Immerse myself into the issues at hand. I will establish relationships with state, county, and airport officials. I will then strategize with the City Commission and staff to develop our growth, encroachment, land management, and infrastructure plans.

Starting as a public affairs officer (PAO) on an Amphibious Navy Aircraft Carrier hosting international media during the Bosnian Conflict, I have had extensive media experience. I have embraced social media as a tool when promoting good news and delivering essential information during emergency management events. Traditional or social media, I ensure accuracy and correct the record when necessary. I believe in partnering with the media to keep the public informed and I respect the media's mission to keep government honest. I am happy to take the lead role when addressing the media but always defer to elected leadership to decide when that will happen.

I do not anticipate anyone contacting the city with negative comments about me. There has been significant negative media coverage of the Newport News – Williamsburg International Airport mainly having to do with my predecessor who was convicted of 22 federal felonies and terminated for other nefarious behavior. Any negative media coverage during my tenure had to do with those legacy issues and the media's attempt to link the past as "click bait" to the present pandemic challenge and my clean-up efforts.

In my spare time, I enjoy traveling and walking with my wife, and spending time with our family, especially our grandson. I am also a big sports fan.

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- Honest
- Loyal
- Intelligent
- Experienced
- Ethical
- Confident

MICHAEL GIARDINO

REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION

I am working as an independent consultant now and my employer is aware of my search for permanent employment. In February, the Peninsula Airport Commission exercised its right to terminate my employment without cause via a 4-1 vote. The vote was along municipality lines, the City of Newport News commissioners for, and the lone City of Hampton commissioner against. Two weeks earlier another Hampton Commissioner resigned over what he told me was how poorly I was being treated by the board. It has since been revealed in the press that members of the board were secretly meeting with at least one member of the Norfolk Airport Authority Board about the future of Hampton Roads airports. It appears that my former commission (or at least the members from Newport News) and I were not on the same page, without my knowledge. In five years I never received a negative performance review. I was given raises and bonuses every year except during COVID-19 when the airport was fiscally stressed. Although owed a large severance package with benefits, I was quickly recruited for an interim leadership position at a commercial service airport, and I accepted it. I am in that position now. My contract runs through July 24, 2023, with a 30-day notice to terminate early.

CURRENT / MOST RECENT SALARY

My final compensation at the Peninsula Airport Commission was \$184,000, including vehicle allowance. My rate as an independent consultant with the City of Brownsville is \$10,000 per month, plus expenses for housing, vehicle, and travel to my home in Virginia.

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
MICHAEL "MIKE" ANTHONY GIARDINO**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Williamsburg City, VA	No Records Found
Cameron County, TX	No Records Found
Newport News City, VA	No Records Found
Monroe County, NY	No Records Found
Monroe County, FL	No Records Found
State	
Virginia	No Records Found
Texas	No Records Found
New York	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Williamsburg City, VA	No Records Found
Cameron County, TX	No Records Found
Newport News City, VA	No Records Found
Monroe County, NY	Results Pending
Monroe County, FL	No Records Found
Federal	
Virginia	No Records Found
Texas	No Records Found
New York	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Virginia	No Records Found
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Credit

Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

**Background Check Summary for
MICHAEL "MIKE" ANTHONY GIARDINO**

Employment

Confirmed

Social Media

Nothing of Concern Found

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

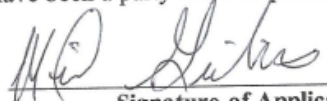
**Background Check Summary for
MICHAEL "MIKE" ANTHONY GIARDINO
Personal Disclosure**

Name of Applicant: MICHAEL GIARDINO

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated?
Yes No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
8. Please list links to all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. linkedin.com/in/michael-giardino-16450019/
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: 
Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to Monique@cb-asso.com or via fax to (561) 621-5965 no later than 5:00 PM MST 06/14/2023.
(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

**Background Check Summary for
MICHAEL “MIKE” ANTHONY GIARDINO
Personal Disclosure Supplement**

Michael Giardino

Supplement to question 9 of Personal Disclosure Questionnaire for Flagler Beach City Manager

While not embarrassing to me at all (and thus an answer of “no” on the questionnaire form), an explanation of my termination from the Peninsula Airport Commission is warranted as there was immediate television and print news coverage. Again, not embarrassing to me at all.

Synopsis.

On February 13, 2023, the Peninsula Airport Commission voted 4-1 to terminate my contract WITHOUT cause, effective March 15, 2023. (Airport consultant Michael Boyd recently wrote about it (I have attached it)). The Commission is made up of four members from the City of Newport News and two members from the City of Hampton. The vote to terminate my contract was along those city-lines. Newport News for termination, Hampton against. Two weeks prior (last week in January 2023) a Hampton Commissioner objected to how I was being treated and he resigned from the board. Before the vote to terminate me, the remaining Hampton Commissioner and former Commission Chair told me, it "would be disastrous if I left the airport."

The board turned over many times in my five years. Since my recruitment there have been a total of 12 different Commissioners on a six-member board. The City of Newport News had little to do with my hire in 2017. Before my recruitment, the Newport News City Manager, who also served as the Commission Chair, resigned in disgrace over an airport (People’s Express Airlines 2.0) investigation and scandal. The scandal brought unwelcomed notoriety to the airport and the City of Newport News, eventually leading to federal criminal indictments. I inherited an awful situation, some of which was not revealed to me during my recruitment. I had a lot of work ahead of me cleaning up the mess.

Unbeknownst to me, there were numerous “sweetheart” arrangements at the airport that were unlawful and not in compliance with FAA Grant Assurances. I abolished those practices. After I cleared the airport of the FAA and State investigations in early 2018, two Newport News commissioners that hired me were swiftly replaced. My predecessor was eventually convicted of 22 federal felonies. In 2022, a candidate for Newport News Mayor did an on-airport television interview openly criticizing my effort to close an on airport mobile home park that violated federal law having to do with airport revenue diversion. I was not popular downtown or with political donors.

Bottom line: I was hired to restore integrity to the airport after the scandals, and I did. I stand by my record. I have canvassed colleagues and aviation industry experts. Each person I’ve had contact with (including ADK staff), remains in my corner. I quickly got a job in Brownsville as Interim Assistant Airport Director while I look for a permanent position on the east coast of the US.

I have remained silent and never spoke with media. The PAC owes me \$90,000 in severance to be paid before March 15, 2024, and they are not contesting that. Avelo Airlines left the airport after my termination only a week after announcing extended scheduled service through September 2023. My former marketing and air service consultants refuse to work for the airport under the current Commission. The vote to terminate me was one sided.

**Background Check Summary for
MICHAEL “MIKE” ANTHONY GIARDINO
Personal Disclosure Supplement**

Since then, it has been revealed in the local news that members of the board were secretly (without my and some board members' knowledge) conferring with members of the Norfolk Airport Authority (a competitor) to explore a relationship. According to the news clip, it also appears the PAC is not fully committed to commercial air service which is one of the many reasons I was brought to the airport. I refused to quit on the community and the employees, so I was let go without cause. I turned down a resignation offer because it was less than my contract severance package and they had no cause for termination.

I am proud of my work and accomplishments. I had the respect and admiration of the staff and commercial partners, and I reciprocated those sentiments. The Hampton Commissioners were solidly in my corner. I am productively working in the airport industry meeting with members of Congress as well as assisting the Brownsville airport with governance reform, the influx of migrants, and rolling out new commercial air service.

CB&A Reference Notes

Reference Notes
Michael Giardino

Bryant Walker - Brownsville Airport Director, TX (956) 459-1227

Mr. Walker has known Mr. Giardino since 2020. Mr. Giardino was hired as the Interim Director. He has already proven his ability to swiftly complete his work while addressing any issues very quickly and efficiently.

While working, Mr. Giardino commands control and is very task oriented. When he encounters an issue, he communicates to his supervisor and provides a detailed timeline for resolution. Communication is one of Mr. Giardino's strong points. He gives frequent status updates, and he wraps up every project with a detailed report.

Mr. Giardino is a skilled decision maker. His decisions are not only good, but they are also fact based. He consistently uses information and data to make decisions rather than making impulsive decisions based on emotion. He relies on his experience and work knowledge to make sound choices.

An example of Mr. Giardino's great leadership happened rather quickly after his arrival. He was responsible for a massive marketing campaign for a new airport route. Though he is not generally a marketing expert, he put together a strategic mix of marketing elements like publications, billboards, social media campaigns, and digital advertising. He managed the marketing firm and an outside partnering organization as well as three employees who were under his direct leadership. The campaign success was measured by enplanements. Anything over 50% is considered successful, he achieved 89% which is an impressive number.

In the position that Mr. Giardino held before working at the Brownsville Airport a Board decision was made that was negative for him. However, Mr. Walker believes that to be a matter of politics and not reflective of Mr. Giardino's job performance. Mr. Walker did not hesitate to hire Mr. Giardino and would like to keep him in Brownsville but understands that he has other obligations.

Words or phrases used to describe Michael Giardino:

- Communicates well,
- Very task oriented,
- Leadership,
- Strategic,
- Experienced, and
- Knowledgeable.

Strengths: Communication, follow through.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Reference Notes
Michael Giardino

**Jamie O'Brien - Executive Assistant to CEO, Peninsula Airport Commission, VA
(805) 258-1750**

Mr. Giardino served as Ms. O'Brien's boss for one year. He has high integrity and a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong. Effective communication is one of the strongest points of his leadership style. He constantly provides employees with opportunities to grow and highly encourages growth.

When interacting with his employees Mr. Giardino made sure to communicate that he was always open to speak about any issues. The employees in the department leaned on him and one another. They were able to clearly communicate with each other and knew where each person stood. He created a team environment.

While in this role, Mr. Giardino was highly regarded as informative and customer service oriented. He always kept the stakeholders at the forefront of his decisions. He was good at thinking creatively and remained professional at all times.

During his time in Newport News, there was a fatal crash on the runway. Mr. Giardino handled it gracefully and solemnly, as appropriate, while being a consummate professional. He was also very compassionate. He reached out to the family of the person who passed. Without being overly emotional, he addressed their needs with humanity. When the media and state police showed up to the airport, he effectively communicated the situation without showing any signs of pressure.

Mr. Giardino was very passionate about integrity and never acted outside of integrity. He always gave 110% which may have impacted his work life balance. However, he was committed to the success of the organization as well as the success of his family. On numerous occasions he sent emails in the middle of the night, which indicated that he was still at work.

Mr. Giardino was exceptional when it came to dealing with the public. As Executive Director, he was the go-to person for media interviews and was the face for special events at the airport. For events of any nature, he was in the crowd shaking hands or talking to passengers about their experiences. He also handled complaints from passengers if he noticed any issues.

Ms. O'Brien would hire Mr. Giardino and would work for him again. He was the best supervisor that she has ever worked for, and she was devastated when he left.

Words or phrases used to describe Michael Giardino:

- Effective communicator,
- Dedicated family man,
- Works well under pressure,
- Attentive,
- Empathetic,
- Strong willed, and
- A man of high integrity.

Reference Notes
Michael Giardino

Strengths: Effective communicator, integrity, mentor, very customer service oriented.

Weaknesses: He cares about the people he works with more than the average supervisor would. However, this does not hinder his job performance.

Barrett Baker - Reporter, Peninsula Chronicle, VA (757) 551-9551

Mr. Baker has known Mr. Giardino since 2021. Mr. Giardino was Mr. Baker's point of contact for the Newport News Williamsburg International Airport. Mr. Baker was as honest as possible, while still putting the airport in the best light possible without sensationalizing the stories. In turn, Mr. Giardino was able to tell the airport's story so that it could be printed. He was very upfront about what was happening. They had a great working relationship.

To increase business, Mr. Giardino reached out to many other flight carriers, and he was very effective in his efforts because he has so many good connections within the media, the community, and the industry.

Mr. Giardino was very upbeat and positive. He always had an eye to the future, though he also understood that it takes time for new programs to gain traction. He remained very positive throughout the process. He was enjoyable to talk to because he was so very knowledgeable. He told the story as it was, without trying to feed you a line. He was great at his job.

A great communicator, Mr. Giardino was always available. When others at the airport were not responsive, he always was. He provided his direct line so that he was easy to reach, and always provided a full picture of what was happening.

Mr. Giardino was doing a great job at the airport, and it was shocking when the Board of Directors let him go. After his departure the Board let a number of other employees go as well. Mr. Baker tried to contact the Board Members to ask why they dismissed Mr. Giardino, but they were not responsive. They may have thought that the best way to address financial difficulties was to cut jobs, but it did not seem very effective.

Mr. Giardino is a great person, and he will do a great job for any organization.

Words or phrases used to describe Michael Giardino:

- Responsive,
- Honest,
- Great communicator,
- Positive,
- Upbeat, and
- Experienced.

Reference Notes
Michael Giardino

Strengths: Good at his job, knowledgeable, good communicator.

Weaknesses: None identified.

**John Borden - Director, Newport News Williamsburg International Airport, VA
(757) 234-2433**

Mr. Borden reported to Mr. Giardino from 2017 to 2023. Mr. Giardino was a mentor to Mr. Borden. They spoke in person every day, Mr. Giardino believes in talking to people, rather than always using email, whether that be the staff, the Board, or members of the public.

Mr. Giardino is very optimistic and team oriented. He clearly communicates his intentions so there are no gray areas or misunderstandings. He maps out the vision and employees know exactly what must be done. He was an outstanding Executive Director.

Mr. Giardino was very professional and had good common sense. He did not change something just to change it. When something was working well, he left it alone. He was quick to resolve any issues that the organization had and even addressed problems that previous Directors ignored. He was very forward thinking.

Attending events that benefit the organization, Mr. Giardino was very visible in the community. He is a people person and is easy to talk to. He speaks straight from the heart and means everything that he says. He is the most honest person that Mr. Borden knows.

Mr. Giardino saved the airport as it was in drastic financial despair when he was hired. He immediately adjusted the airline rates and then cut unnecessary budget items, which was critical to their success during COVID. He can fix any issue that he encounters or is asked to address.

Everyone that Mr. Borden knows has a positive opinion of Mr. Giardino. He handles stress well because he is always prepared and has a great deal of experience. He is fairly even keeled, with slight hills and valleys, but nothing drastic. He will analyze a situation to learn what he could have done better, without berating staff or himself in the process.

Whoever hires Mr. Giardino will have the top of the heap. He works all hours of the day and night and is really dedicated. He jumps in headfirst and puts everything he has into his work.

Words or phrases used to describe Michael Giardino:

- Optimistic,
- Very team oriented,
- Good communicator,
- Professional,
- Forward thinking, and
- Problem solver.

Reference Notes
Michael Giardino

Strengths: Positive, mentor, communicates well, clearly outlines goals and objectives, great problem solver.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Prepared by: Alissa Holmes
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)
February 14, 2023

Airport board fires executive director - Commissioners hope change will help bring in more commercial air service - Newport news

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The board that oversees Newport News/Williamsburg Airport on Monday ousted the man who's been at the airport's helm for the past five years. The Peninsula Airport Commission voted 4-1 to terminate the employment of Airport Executive Director **Mike Giardino**, effective immediately.

Chairwoman Lindsey Carney Smith said commissioners hope to bring in more commercial air service at the struggling airport - and hope a change in leadership will help make that happen. "We really need to restore our commercial air service that we provide to our community to pre-COVID levels," Smith said. "And we feel like now's the time to make a change to try to get back to that successful delivery of service."

The Newport News/Williamsburg Airport - with only five outbound commercial flights per day - has largely been squeezed out of the Southeastern Virginia air service market by larger airports in Norfolk and Richmond. Only two carriers - Avelo Airlines and American - now serve the airport. Though the airport expects to bring in more than 225,000 passengers this year with Avelo Airlines' new service to Florida, it's a far cry from traffic in years past. Flights from Newport News had already fallen drastically before the coronavirus pandemic, but it exacerbated the problem. Passenger traffic has fallen to about 166,000 passengers in the past fiscal year, down from more than 1 million in 2012.

When asked why **Giardino** was to blame for the reduced service, Smith said the change isn't about assigning blame but spurring growth. "By no means did we say it was his fault," she said. "And we appreciate the past five years of his service ... But as with anything else, a leadership change sometimes can facilitate different results." **Giardino** had no comment after the meeting, walking briskly across the lobby to his office. He walked out of the building a few minutes later, asking Deputy Director John Borden to accompany him out, **Giardino's** executive assistant said. Borden will lead the airport on an interim basis until a replacement is found.

Giardino, 60, was hired as executive director in October 2017. A retired Navy commander and helicopter pilot who once served as executive officer of Naval Air Station Key West, he served as a village manager in upstate New York before leading an airport in Rochester, New York, for five years. He was hired in Newport News at a \$165,000 salary, but his more recent salary - and any severance to be paid him - couldn't be immediately determined Monday.

The board's motion at Monday's special meeting said the executive's job duties include "meeting the performance standards established annually" by the (Peninsula Airport Commission), and that board members deem it to be in the airport's "best interest" to replace him. Voting to fire **Giardino** were commissioners Lindsey Carney Smith, Tommy Garner, Sharon Scott and Jennifer

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Smith, while commissioner Jay Joseph voted not to terminate him. Another commissioner, Brian Kelly, abruptly resigned from the six-member board Jan. 30, and was said to be unhappy with the board's direction regarding **Giardino**. He couldn't be reached Monday afternoon.

Joseph and Smith declined to comment as they walked out of the meeting, saying they were leaving comments to Carney-Smith. Scott, the former Newport News city councilwoman, would say only that "we're just moving forward just to get some new leadership to make some positive changes at the airport."

Garner said he wants nothing for the best for **Giardino**, calling him a good person and "a great guy on a personal level. "But he said the board is "looking for growth, we're looking for development, and I just feel like it's time for a new person." "As far as the direction of the airport, I'd like to see the airport back to where we were years ago when AirTran was there," Garner said. "Maybe with some new fresh leadership, we may get there." AirTran used to run direct daily flights to New York, Boston, Atlanta and Florida and accounted for nearly half the airport's passengers. But AirTran pulled out in 2012 when Southwest Airlines bought the low-cost carrier and consolidated routes. **Giardino**' s hiring followed the ouster of former director Ken Spirito over the People Express fiasco. Spirito was convicted in federal court after a secret \$5 million loan guarantee to the startup airline.

Since he arrived in Newport News, **Giardino** has touted public transparency, freely talking about airport issues and generally sharing airport documents. On the day he was hired, he vowed "to aggressively address the community's air travel needs." But even as **Giardino** spent significant time and energy meeting with airlines and attending conferences to try to court new air service, the pandemic led to more setbacks as airlines cut back further on flights.

In April 2020, **Giardino** and a contingent of Peninsula officials sounded the alarm about the federal interpretation of the pandemic stimulus bill, which he predicted would allow carriers such as Delta Air Lines and American to consolidate service in Norfolk rather than being obligated to continue serving both airports. A month later, Delta "temporarily" left Newport News in May 2020, never to return. American Airlines significantly cut back on flights.

The airport also derives significant revenue from general aviation traffic and hangar rentals, as people fly and charter smaller private planes. But the reduced passenger traffic has led to far lower revenue from airlines, parking fees and car rentals. In the year that ended last July, the airport took in \$5.4 million in operating revenue but paid \$8 million in expenses, for an operating loss of \$2.6 million, budget numbers show. **Giardino** has made up the shortfall with federal grants.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

November 9, 2022

Nearly all residents vacated trailer park - Airport doesn't expect court action for removal

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The trailer park at Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is nearly empty after the weekend deadline for tenants to vacate the property. Only three residents remain. Josiah Gayle - who has lived in the park for 35 years - was still residing at the park Monday in his trailer on the park's outer edge. Though all tenants were supposed to leave by midnight Saturday, the airport gave Gayle, 65, who suffers from significant health issues, an extra week. "He needs a little more help," Airport Executive Director **Mike Giardino** said. "We're trying to be compassionate toward people, especially when they've got special circumstances."

But for most, Saturday marked the final exodus from the Patrick Henry Mobile Home Park. The Peninsula Airport Commission, which owns the property, announced the park's closure in May and has been pushing to get tenants off the property ever since, including offering stipends to entice tenants to leave early. The process has been heart-wrenching for many who have been unable to move their aging trailers out of the park and struggled to find new housing.

Giardino said the United Way has arranged for housing for Gayle, and he's "finally accepted that help." But the new home won't be ready until next week. Still, Gayle said he's unhappy about having to move from his home of more than three decades. "I'm homeless," he said tersely. "They took everything I got."

Only one other trailer is still occupied - a couple was planning to have their trailer moved, but learned at the last minute that it couldn't be. The airport gave them a few more days to find something else, **Giardino** said. "They're nice people, and they've always been great tenants," he said. "Their circumstances changed at the last minute, and we want to help them." But everyone else is gone, **Giardino** said, and the airport doesn't expect to have to take anyone to court to force them out. Many tenants - even those who stayed until the end - have gotten \$4,000 to move, he said. That includes \$2,000 for their trailer title and \$2,000 to actually vacate. That was on top of free rent and water for six months between May 5 and Nov. 5.

On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of tenants lost trailers they owned outright, plus any money they pumped into the homes over the years. Some residents told the Daily Press they invested tens of thousands of dollars into rehabbing their properties.

It's a relief, **Giardino** said, that "the process that needed to take place" is now reaching a conclusion. "But there's a human aspect to it," he said. "And I think we did the best we could under the circumstances. It was about compassion and humanity while doing the right thing from the legal perspective." The 75-acre park has been around since at least the 1950s. Tenants owned the trailers, paying \$461 a month in recent years for the lot fee, water and trash. The 77 trailers on site in May was down from just under 100 homes on the site three years ago. There were

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

some 250 mobile homes on the property in its 1995 heyday. **Giardino** deemed the closure necessary, saying the airport couldn't afford to upgrade the park's aging infrastructure after years of neglect. The financially struggling airport, he said, could no longer afford to keep up with the Band-Aid fixes increasingly needed. He said it would cost millions to make needed improvements to water lines and stormwater drainage systems.

While a handful of trailers have been successfully moved out, **Giardino** said the airport will have the remaining trailers destroyed. If there's scrap metal that can be salvaged, he said, the airport will go through the proper government protocol for that. For cars and anything else that's left, he said, "it's abandoned property, and we'll dispose of it properly." As for the many stray cats still left at the park, **Giardino** said that issue will be addressed just like the other felines found living elsewhere at the airport. "They will all be dealt with humanely," he said.

Manny Aguilar, 29, was at the park on Monday morning with his wife, Melanie, and two of his boys - aged 2 and 4 - getting some last items out. That included a white utility van that doesn't run and sat dormant for months. Aguilar attached some chains to it, with the couple then using their large GMC pickup to yank it out of its resting spot. Over the weekend, Aguilar spray painted "PHTP 4 Life" in large black lettering on his trailer. That stands for "Patrick Henry Trailer Park for Life," he said. That's in honor of what the park has meant to him and his family. He grew up in the park, living there since he was 10 after his parents moved here from Mexico, and his parents still lived there a couple trailers down.

The Aguilars are moving into a condo, paying nearly four times the airport's monthly trailer fees. But Aguilar said he's "sad as a dad" that he no longer owns his family's home. Two of his neighbors, he said, destroyed their own trailers over the weekend. They had rented a forklift to move some sheds, and used the machine to tear down their trailers too. "They didn't want to give the airport the pleasure of doing it," Aguilar said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Richmond Times-Dispatch (VA)

October 7, 2022

Plane crash at airport in Newport News kills 1, seriously injures 2 - One person dies in small plane crash at Newport News airport, two others suffer life-threatening injuries

Author/Byline: Jane Harper

One person died and two others were seriously injured Thursday after a small plane crashed at the Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport, according to state police. The three were onboard a Cessna 172 private plane when it crashed into the woods upon takeoff, said **Michael Giardino**, executive director of the airport. The two who were injured were taken to Riverside Regional Hospital, ...

The three were onboard a Cessna 172 private plane when it crashed into the woods upon takeoff, said **Michael Giardino**, executive director of the airport. The two who were injured were taken to Riverside Regional Hospital, according to a news release from state police. Both were said to have life-threatening injuries.

The Cessna 172 Skyhawk is a four-seat, single-engine plane. An active fuel leak was discovered at the scene and was contained, **Giardino** said. The crash was reported at 3:22 p.m. on the north side of the airport. The facility was closed for nearly two hours afterward. Airport Rescue responded to the crash, as well as Newport News firefighters and police. Virginia State Police are handling the initial investigation, and the National Transportation and Safety Board has been notified, **Giardino** said.

The plane that crashed is based out of the Newport News-Williamsburg airport. **Giardino** said he didn't know where it was headed or who was on it. State police said they were working to notify the families of the victims.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
August 1, 2022

Newport News to see new Florida routes starting at \$29

Author/Byline: Trevor Metcalfe

Travelers at the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport will soon be able to experience the Sunshine State for as low as \$29 for a one-way flight. Avelo Airlines, a Houston-based discount carrier, said it will begin offering flights to Orlando and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, this fall. The airline plans to start offering Orlando service Oct. 19 and Fort Lauderdale Oct. 20. "We are thrilled that Avelo Airlines is adding Newport News to the list of destinations they serve," Newport News Mayor McKinley Price said in a July 26 announcement. In addition to offering affordable options for Hampton Roads residents, he said the flights will help showcase the convenience of the Peninsula's airport.

Introductory one-way flights will begin at \$29 for Orlando and \$49 for Fort Lauderdale. After the inaugural Oct. 19 flight, both Orlando and Fort Lauderdale flights will run Thursdays and Sundays from Oct. 20 to Nov. 9 and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays starting Nov. 10. Avelo Airlines Chairman and CEO Andrew Levy said airline leaders chose Newport News for its central location between Richmond and South Hampton Roads. He said the airline usually enters markets where there is no similar service available. "We're really excited to bring some new options to people who live in the region," Levy said.

Levy said the strategy is similar to one he used while at Allegiant Air, which also serves smaller destinations with fewer direct flights. Avelo sells several add-ons to supplement ticket revenue, including fees for both carry-on and checked baggage, extra legroom and food service. If the two initial routes are successful, Levy said airline leaders will explore adding flights to other Florida locations like Tampa Bay, West Palm Beach, Fort Myers and Sarasota.

Peninsula passengers will enjoy the new services because it means they won't have to trek across the bridges and tunnels to neighboring airports, where traffic delays can make travel days even longer, said **Michael Giardino**, Newport News/Williamsburg airport executive director. "These flights fulfill what we already know is high demand for great air service in our region," **Giardino** said.

The airport had lost business while competing with the Norfolk and Richmond airports because of COVID-19 issues and airline consolidations, **Giardino** told a panel last year. Norfolk attracted low-cost carrier Breeze Airways in June 2021 that now offers flights to Florida destinations and other locations like Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Charleston, South Carolina. Still, the Peninsula airport landed a \$15 million expansion project in September from Newport News aerospace company Aery Aviation, which will create a new 60,000-square-foot hangar and engineering facility.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
July 11, 2022

Local airports avoiding summer chaos - Staffing shortages have hit rest of industry hard

Author/Byline: Sandra J. Pennecke

Hampton Roads airports are working to accommodate industry challenges, but the region isn't experiencing the long lines, staffing shortages and delayed and canceled flights that other cities are experiencing, airport leaders said. Norfolk International Airport has been busier but well-staffed, and both vendors and the Transportation Security Administration were prepared for Fourth of July demand, said Charlie Braden, director of market development at Norfolk Airport Authority. "With regards to cancellations and delays, we're really sort of at the whim of the airlines," Braden said. So far this summer, Braden said the Norfolk airport is experiencing a 10% reduction in departures compared with the summer of 2019 along with an 11% increase in seats. And 2019 was the airport's highest passenger growth year on record, Braden noted. "This dichotomy of less departures but more seats happens when the airlines use fewer but larger aircraft," Braden said. "Using fewer aircraft helps with the airline staffing issues, while using larger aircraft helps to serve high passenger demand." Part of the growth, Braden pointed out, is the entrance of Breeze Airways into the Norfolk market. Norfolk International Airport has seven airlines that fly nonstop to 40 different destinations. To rectify the staffing shortages, the industry is accelerating the pipeline to get pilots certified to fly, he said. "They didn't anticipate the faster demand to be this high after the pandemic," he said. Norfolk International has between 80 to 90 departures daily. Braden noted the airport only had three cancellations, all to the Newark airport in New Jersey, on a recent weekday. When cancellations occur, Braden said airlines try to notify passengers well in advance and accommodate them on later flights. The airport terminals are open 24 hours a day with food, beverage and retail vendors, he said. "We're doing our best to make sure the experience turns out well for travelers," Braden said.

Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is operating 35-40% below pre-pandemic numbers, said **Mike Giardino**, executive director for the Peninsula Airport Commission. That stems from Delta Air Lines consolidating and dropping its service to the airport in May 2020. American Airlines is the only carrier flying in and out of Newport News to and from one destination - Charlotte, North Carolina. "We're down to four to six Charlotte flights per day," **Giardino** said. Affected by the pandemic, federal regulations, fuel prices and pilot shortages, **Giardino** said it's been a rough go, but the Peninsula airport is still recruiting air service.

While its workforce is 60% of what it was in 2019, **Giardino** said the airport is appropriately staffed to handle the current traffic flow. "We own the realm of speed at our airport; we can get you from the parking lot into the airplane much faster than any other airport in the area," he said. For travelers faced with cancellations, **Giardino** said airlines have paid for transportation to Richmond and Norfolk International Airport if that is the only option. "The building is open 24/7 - worst case, if folks have no other option than to wait," **Giardino** said. "We try to give passengers the best experience we can here."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
August 2, 2021

Newport News airport is getting closer to having flights to D.C.

Author/Byline: Dave Ress

Newport News' airport got a big boost in its yearslong effort to get flights to Washington Dulles International Airport to connect to a third major international gateway. Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport already connects to the gateways of Charlotte and Philadelphia, but has been working to establish flight service to Dulles airport for more than three years. And it's getting closer to that goal, having won a \$847,646 U.S. Department of Transportation grant to support service to Dulles for up to two years.

Local governments have pledged a total of \$600,000 for the effort and the airport itself will spend \$150,000 on marketing. The airport will also waive various fees normally charged to airlines for up to two years, amounting to another \$400,000 of support.

United Airlines wrote in support of the airport's request for the grant. While the grant doesn't mean United is definitely coming, the airline's support, which comes after many years of discussions, makes it more likely than not. "Now, it's time to talk to them about the how and when," airport executive director **Michael Giardino** said. He said the odd amount of the grant is based on airport staff calculations of the financial support needed for twice daily service, with 50-seat planes.

The pursuit of service to Dulles marks a major shift in the airport's business strategy, away from chasing discount airlines operating large planes to connections, even with smaller regional jets, to hub airports. "Air service in small communities is critical to the vitality of the local economy and non-stop service to Washington, D.C. (IAD) would be an important addition for the entire region," United's director for domestic network planning, Mark Weithofer, wrote the DOT. That has been especially true because the pandemic has cut air travel options for the Peninsula sharply, with a loss of nearly 70% of pre-COVID seats, Weithofer said.

Giardino, however, said Newport has been bouncing back somewhat. Traffic had been down to 25% to 30% of 2019 levels during most of the pandemic, but has been running at about 50% in the late spring and so far this summer, even with fewer flights and one less airline. He said American Airlines, with five daily flights to Charlotte and two to Philadelphia has been selling up to 90% of available seats and that its Newport News business is profitable.

The DOT grant for the Dulles service can be used to make up any losses United might see in a Newport News service, as would the local funds. About \$100,000 of the grant can be used for marketing. The grant comes from the same Small Community Air Service Development Program that the former members of the airport commission and executive director used to support the short-lived People Express service in 2014. But some of those funds inappropriately went to pay off a loan to People Express from TowneBank, along with a much larger grant from the state

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

aviation department. That eventually led to the dismissal of then-executive director Ken Spirito and the resignation of Newport News City Manager Jim Bourey. Spirito has since been convicted of misuse of federal monies.

The airport's request for funds was backed by Representatives Rob Wittman, R-Westmoreland, Elaine Luria, D-Norfolk, and Robert C. Scott, D-Newport News, as well as Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine. Local government officials on the Peninsula also wrote in support. "That's what DOT likes to see - community support," **Giardino** said.

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

November 14, 2020

Peninsula - Soldiers - waiting - at airport - a Peninsula tradition

Author/Byline: Dave Ress

It's a Peninsula tradition - several hundred soldiers camping out, sometimes for days, at the Newport News airport, waiting for a flight home for the holidays - and it's got people around the facility worried. "I'm concerned there won't be enough flights," said Diane Fry, director of the USO office at Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport, as she pauses to talk about how volunteers traditionally pitch in with meals, treats, entertainment and visits for soldiers as they wait. **Mike Giardino**, the airport's executive director, is even blunter: "We just don't have enough seats," he said.

Block leave at the holidays eases up the usual limitations on how many service members can be on leave at any one time - it's a recognition that young people, some of whom are far from family and friends, really need the time off. **Giardino** remembers that from his Navy career - as well as some his own 20-plus-hour nonstop highway marathons back in the day. "I was 22, I wanted to get home for Christmas and I was for sure gonna get home for Christmas," he said. And **Giardino**, the one-time commander of a 250-sailor aviation maintenance department at Naval Station Norfolk, remembering the holiday season lectures about safe driving that his senior chief used to insist on, worries that not enough flights means too many soldiers hitting the road for their own version of an overlong drive home.

For years, the airport has tried to help out by opening up its usually shuttered B concourse to host the soldiers and working closely with USO and community volunteers to make the wait for flights as painless as possible. Soldiers arrive in busloads - the first lot, often at 1 a.m., more than a week before Christmas. There's a regular bus shuttle back to Fort Eustis as they return to Newport News after New Year's Day. But with 500 to 800 soldiers flying, some inevitably end up waiting - "then there's always the ones who were sleeping when their flight was announced and we have to find another for them," the USO's Fry said. "We'll bring in Santa, people will come with candy - I've seen soldiers lining up at 4 a.m., just like kids, when they come around," said Fry.

She and **Giardino** think social distancing in the terminal, and the airlines' firm rules about masks and in-flight ventilation make flying a safer alternative to driving. But the pandemic has hammered airlines, and at the Newport News airport that's translated to a drop in service - from the seven daily flights American Airlines used to fly to Charlotte, and three to Philadelphia, the carrier is now averaging a bit more than three daily flights to the North Carolina airport. Delta, which had offered three daily flights to Atlanta, stopped flying that route in the spring. "They've had to furlough people, cut services ... they're bleeding cash," he said. The airport isn't. Major belt-tightening as it cleaned house after the previous board and management secretly spent \$5 million of public funds to try to get the short-lived People Express Airlines launched means the airport currently has little debt. Its annual interest cost is \$292,000, nothing like the millions of

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

dollars a year in interest other airports pay. **Giardino** is hoping the airport's board of commissioners will agree with him that offering airlines a temporary break on terminal rents and landing fees - he calls it a kind of thank-you gesture - might help get some more flights. "We're in a position of strength and we want to help our partners who are not ... we want to help our community," he said. He's thinking of that as a way to remind American and Delta that there's a lot of business to be done in Newport News.

It's not just the block leave either - in fact, unlike some airports, Newport News normally has relatively steady traffic because some 70% of people flying to and from the Peninsula are business travelers. That's a high proportion. And most are connected with the military or with the defense contractors who serve the military, and the travel they do isn't ordinarily for the sort of mission that a video conference call can manage. That, along with the airport's relatively low fees and the financial muscle to offer incentives, was part of the pitch that the airport's marketing director, Jenifer Spratley, was making last week at the TakeOff North America air service forum in Denver.

At the forum's traditional "speed dating" session - when airports make the rounds of airlines to try to sell themselves - Spratley also pointed out that the expansion of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel and Interstate 64 is going to make it even more difficult for Peninsula travelers to get to other airports. It's been a familiar line at recent air service forums - but this time, unlike in recent years, she got more than the usual "that's nice." Four of the seven airlines she pitched asked her to come back with more information. And, she added, the kind of rent and fee waiver **Giardino** is mulling may not cost much, but "is exactly the kind of gesture airlines remember."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

May 19, 2020

Operating hours slashed for airport's control tower - Cuts made to Newport News/Williamsburg International amid reductions in air traffic

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Federal Aviation Administration has sharply cut back on the operating hours for the control tower at the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport, which is seeing drastically reduced air traffic as a result of the coronavirus. The control tower is now scheduled to be open only eight hours a day - from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. That's down from the previous 17 hours a day - from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The FAA said Newport News is one of about 100 airports nationwide to see the cutbacks in tower operations. "These facilities have seen a significant reduction in flights, especially during the evening and nighttime hours, since the pandemic began," the agency said in a statement. The cutbacks will "protect our employees" from exposure to the virus, the FAA said, adding that there will be enough manpower in the towers to "maintain safe and efficient operations" while also "minimizing health risks to our workforce."

The upcoming schedule for American Airlines - soon to be the only commercial carrier serving Newport News - shows that most of its takeoffs and landings in Newport News will take place when the airport's control tower is closed. American's flight schedule shows that of the six flights in and out of the airport in June, four of them are outside of the tower's new operating hours - outbound flights at 7 a.m. and 5:57 p.m., and inbound flights at 5:27 p.m. and 9:42 p.m.

But Newport News airport officials say that because pilots don't need air traffic controllers to fly or move planes on the ground, the FAA's decision won't affect the ability of planes to fly in and out of the airport. "This has zero - zero - impact," Executive Director **Mike Giardino** said. "There are airports all over the country that have commercial service but no air traffic control towers." There are very rare circumstances - such as certain kinds of stormy weather - in which air traffic controllers can improve safety, he said. "But those times are so infrequent," he said, that they are barely worth mentioning. "We don't operate unsafely," **Giardino** said. "Safety is built into aviation. We had operations without a control tower before COVID, and we will afterwards. The airport is open and will remain open. This is just the FAA managing its resources."

Airport spokeswoman Jenifer Spratley added that of the country's 20,000 airports, only 500 have air traffic control towers. And of the ones with towers, she said, many of the towers aren't operating 24/7. The FAA likewise asserted that tower cutbacks "will not have operational effects" at the 100 airports seeing the tower cutbacks. The agency said it examined hourly aircraft counts, flights on commercial airlines and other factors in making its decisions. The changes, the FAA said, "are not intended to be made permanent." "As operational traffic counts and other factors change, the FAA will "make appropriate adjustments," the agency said. Of the

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

100 airports seeing cuts, only one other is in Virginia: The Manassas Regional Airport. Before the pandemic, Delta Air Lines had been flying three times a day from Newport News to Atlanta - with connections from there to other destinations. That was cut back in April, and 10 days ago the airline announced it's leaving Newport News for now, consolidating local flights in Norfolk on a temporary basis. American had been flying seven times a day to Charlotte and three to Philadelphia before the pandemic. It's now flying three times daily to Charlotte and plans to stop flying to Philadelphia in June. That leaves six takeoffs or landings in Newport News on the Charlotte flights - four of which will be while the control tower is closed.

Spratley said pilots must follow standard FAA regulations - such as basic right-of-way rules - without traffic controllers. "As part of every pilot's training ... they learn how to safely operate their aircraft at an airport without an operating control tower," Spratley wrote.

Jack Sheehan, a private pilot who has flown in and out of the Newport News airport for about 30 years, says general aviation pilots are OK with the tower's hours being cut. "We are used to flying to airports that don't have towers," he said. Air traffic in Newport News, Sheehan said, "is not anywhere like it used to be." The FAA's air traffic control system, he said, includes an "approach control center" in Norfolk that's separate from each airport's control tower. The "approach control" employees communicate with many pilots by radar, clearing them for landing at Norfolk, Newport News and other airports from several miles away.

The airport control towers then take over the communication. When a tower is closed, Sheehan said, the pilots communicate with each other on a common radio frequency. "It's self-controlled," he said. "We call it 'calling in the blind.' You are announcing where you are to all traffic in the area. You announce your identification - such as 'this is Cessna 1234 - and your intentions, what you're going to do. You may be landing, flying overhead, practicing an approach."

"You might say, 'We're gonna land on runway 7,' and you give warnings all the way down so people who are flying know where the other planes are," Sheehan said. The control tower, he said, also handles "ground control" - the movement on the tarmacs, taxiways and runways - as well as calls for rescue service if there's a mishap on the ground. When a tower is closed, he said, the pilots will communicate with each other about ground movements, too. "That works pretty well in places that are not very crowded," Sheehan said.

Giardino said protocols are in place for the airport's Fire Department to monitor the airport after hours for mishaps and need for rescue service.

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
May 2, 2020

Drastic cuts at Newport News airport - \$398,000 lost in April; 36 employees laid off because of coronavirus fallout

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

Reeling from drastically reduced air travel caused by the coronavirus, the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is slashing its budget and cutting workers to make ends meet. Thirty-six airport employees - 29 part-time and seven full-time - have been let go, including several in upper management ranks. Assistant Executive Director Melissa Cheaney and Director of Finance and Administration Renee Carr are among those who have lost their jobs. Both have worked at the airport for more than 10 years, but were conspicuous by their absence at an electronic Peninsula Airport Commission on Thursday.

"We're under fiscal distress right now," Executive Director **Mike Giardino** said in an interview this week. "There's absolutely no doubt about it. We're bleeding cash like every other organization." The airport lost \$398,000 in April, he said, and was on an "unsustainable" track to lose \$1 million in operations by June 30. "The results of this pandemic have been catastrophic," he said. No matter how you slice the numbers, "We need to run a very lean airport for a sustained period of time."

The job cuts leave the airport with 52 employees, nine of whom are part-time. That's down from 88 employees - 50 full time and 38 part time - less than two months ago. The layoffs also included the airport's director of business development, Viveca Munger, and its director of strategic initiatives and government relations, Kevin Knapp, as well as a restaurant manager, civilian public safety worker and receptionist. The 29 part-timers who were let go include parking lot attendants, shuttle bus drivers, custodians, restaurant employees and a firefighter trainee. "This was a budget decision only" and the result of "the emergency situation that we're under," **Giardino** said. "COVID-19 did this." "It's a very difficult situation because it has to do with individuals," he said. "Thirty-six people are no longer working at the airport. All with important roles. All have skills that added value to the airport ... All 36 deserve respect and our thanks for their dedicated service." The cuts don't count employees of airlines and car rental companies at the airport who also lost their jobs. Cheaney and Carr did not return phone calls left for them Tuesday.

In early March, with lots of packed flights last year and into this year, the airport was \$750,000 in the black on its \$8.7 million annual budget, which ends June 30. "We were having a great fiscal year," **Giardino** said, saying the airport was "on the cusp of getting even better" with good prospects for new flights. But now, passenger traffic on the airport's two airlines - Delta Air Lines and American Airlines - only number a few dozen people a day, down from upwards of 600 daily at this time last year. The low point came April 21, when the airport had only eight outbound passengers. The sharp reduction translates into far less money coming to the airport from parking fees, car rental revenue, and plane landing fees - all among the airport's biggest

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

money generators. "I'm running a completely different organization than the one I ran two months ago," **Giardino** said. He told board members he's cutting the airport's proposed budget for the year that begins July 1 to \$5.8 million - down 32% from this year. "Irrevocable damage could occur if we did not contemplate these kinds of measures," **Giardino** told the six-member board of the cost cutting. With the job cuts, he's reduced pay and benefits by 35% - or \$1.7 million lower than the current budget. Airport finance manager Jessica Minor told the board that the airport has also budgeted less money for supplies - in part because of a closed restaurant and lower cleaning needs - and is looking to save on utility bills, grass cutting and carpet cleaning. "We're putting all optional repairs on hold for now," she said.

The slashing is coming despite the fact that the airport got a \$4.1 million grant from the federal stimulus package a few weeks ago. Though that grant amounts to nearly half the airport's current annual operating budget, **Giardino** said it won't last long without significant cuts. Without sharp budget reductions, he said, the airport could expect significant monthly losses going out many months. "How fast we burn into the grant," **Giardino** said, will depend on how big those monthly losses are. If they're \$300,000 a month, for example, the grant would be used up far more quickly than if the losses are half that size. Airport commission Chairwoman Sharon Scott asked **Giardino** at Thursday's meeting for further details on the job cuts. "We appreciate all the sacrifices that everyone is making - and even the ones who were terminated, furloughed or otherwise not at the airport anymore," she said. "We would like some details on how that's being handled, just to make sure that we are in compliance with labor laws that everyone's departure is handled properly." Airport board member Jay Joseph added that he and Commissioner George Wallace, who didn't attend the electronic meeting, wanted to know the airport's terms with the departing workers. "What types of discussions were had about future employment prospects, and was there any consideration about benefits, specifically health insurance going forward?" Joseph asked.

Giardino said he was recommending that the board provide health benefits at least partially into the fiscal year that begins in July. "We are extending benefits to those who are eligible for as long as we can," he told the Daily Press later. **Giardino** said he can't speak to the opportunities for "future employment" to bring the workers back, because "it's a much different environment than where we were running," and it's not clear when things will pick up again. The airport will be "lucky," he said, if this year's traffic is half that of 2019. An 80% recovery is "a long way off." It took nearly three years, he said, for air traffic to come back after Sept. 11, 2001. **Giardino** also cautioned that the same stimulus package that gave the airport \$4.1 million also contains a provision that allows Delta and American to abandon Newport News and consolidate local flights in Norfolk. The airport likely hasn't hit bottom yet, **Giardino** said, so he didn't want to "offer false hope to anyone." "The numbers for the rest of this fiscal year will be horrible," he said. "There would be no excuse on the planet to continue bleeding cash, as tragic as it is. And it is tragic. It's terrible." But, **Giardino** added, there's a path forward. "I took bold, swift action to ensure we have a tomorrow," he said.

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

April 9, 2020

Airport fears end of service - Stimulus could mean diminished funding for Newport News

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is sounding the alarm. The economic chaos sown by the new coronavirus - and the federal stimulus law designed to alleviate that chaos - could lead to the end of commercial air service at the airport, local officials fear. On the surface, the stimulus bill, signed into law by President Trump almost two weeks ago, requires airlines to promise to keep flying out of markets they already serve to be eligible for billions of dollars in bailout money. But in an order Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Transportation interpreted that provision to mean that airlines serving Hampton Roads need to fly out of only one of the region's two commercial airports in order to comply. Delta Air Lines and American Airlines - the two remaining carriers serving Newport News - have not announced plans to consolidate operations at the larger Norfolk International Airport, where both already have service. But the possibility that they could do so is alarming airport and government officials on the Peninsula.

York County Board of Supervisors Chairman Chad Green said he was highly concerned. "On a scale of one to 10, I consider it an 11," he said of his level of worry. "If they leave, we might never get commercial air service back." "The airport is on the right track, and I would hate to see it lose service," Green said. "People who don't live here or haven't been here don't understand the different communities - the bodies of water and the community boundaries. If they kill air service out of Newport News, this could have a definitive negative effect on the public and all of the businesses around here." Given that airports are considered national assets, there's little chance the Newport News airport would ever be closed for a lack of commercial flights. But air carriers leaving the Peninsula, even temporarily, could significantly harm the airport and its crucial revenue streams - from parking fees to car rentals to plane landing fees. The airport's other revenue streams - such as general aviation flights, military warfare training companies and an on-site trailer park - won't pay the bills, Green said. "That won't keep the lights on on the runways," he said.

"We were blindsided," Newport News Airport Executive Director **Mike Giardino** said of learning last week of the DOT's interpretation of the stimulus bill. He immediately called on city and county leaders to drum up support, telling them in bold lettering: "We need your help." He also got in touch with U.S. Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, U.S. Reps. Bobby Scott, Elaine Luria and Rob Wittman, and state officials.

While Delta and American "have given us no indication that they are leaving," **Giardino** said, the possibility is highly concerning. "If you're the airline and you have the ability to consolidate your service in one location when you're bleeding money, you might do it," he said. "They're in dire straits ... and this could incentivize them to consolidate in Norfolk." **Giardino** asserted that Congress did not envision that airlines could get federal money and then stop serving particular

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airports. "I don't think (the lawmakers) contemplated this," he said. "The fact that airlines can choose to do this at all was not the intent of the legislation. The intent was to keep the airlines whole while they maintained some level of service." One paragraph in the \$2 trillion stimulus bill, also known as the CARES Act, was designed to protect air service to smaller communities. That paragraph said the Transportation Department is to require "to the extent reasonable and practicable" that airlines getting the money continue serving "any point" in the country they were serving before April 1. The law added that the agency "shall take into consideration the air transportation needs of small and remote communities." But the rub is the phrase "any point." Lawmakers didn't define that term, and the Transportation Department used Bureau of Transportation Statistics to determine the locations.

When the DOT's proposed order last week defined Norfolk and Newport News as serving the same point - meaning only one of the airports need be served - government officials from the Peninsula voiced objections. "It has been brought to our attention that our airport is being excluded from the provisions of the CARES Act because of our seeming proximity to Norfolk," Green wrote to the DOT on April 2. Traffic issues in the region, he said, are a huge issue that make two airports crucial. "Our connectivity and economic prosperity is dependent upon our citizens and visitors being able to transverse major waterways that include numerous bridges and tunnels," Green wrote in the letter. "It is not uncommon for any one or more of the bridges or tunnels to be obstructed or closed due to accidents or other traffic related issues resulting in extended delays." The Peninsula, Green wrote, is home to Newport News Shipbuilding, the Jefferson Labs, NASA Langley, Fort Eustis, Langley Air Force base and the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station. "The elimination of commercial air service at our local airport, which provides the quickest and best option, will impact their operations," he said. Such a change would have a large impact on the Peninsula economically, he said, meaning the stimulus bill will "not only fail to provide relief," but "will instead compound the impact of the recession." "We strongly believe even a temporary loss of air service at (the Newport News airport) would have a negative, long-term impact on our business and regional economy - exactly what the Department and Federal government are trying to alleviate," Green wrote.

Identical letters were then submitted by Newport News City Manager Cynthia Rohlf, Hampton City Manager Mary Bunting, Williamsburg City Manager Andrew Trivette and Poquoson Mayor W. Eugene Hunt Jr. Bob McKenna, the president and CEO of the Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce, agreed that it would hurt the local economy if the airlines pulled out of Newport News. "And selfishly speaking, I live in Newport News and like being able to drive 10 or 15 minutes to the airport, park and be at the gate in five minutes," he said. "It's a well-run and well-equipped airport, and it's a great asset to have that airport here." But airlines also wrote to the DOT last week, saying they liked the flexibility afforded by the proposed rules. "Delta strongly supports the (Department of Transportation's) proposals to give each carrier maximum flexibility to meet its domestic service obligations by ... serving any airport or combination of airports that provide reasonable access to the communities the carrier serves," the airline wrote. The DOT's proposal, Delta said, "reflect sensible, balanced approaches" that will provide "minimum air transportation access for all Americans during this emergency while recognizing the economic reality that carriers must still attempt to match capacity to demand." The DOT issued its final

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

order Tuesday, siding with the airlines. "The ability of carriers to consolidate operations at a single airport serving a point is an important flexibility that furthers the objectives of the CARES Act," the order said. "Requiring carriers to continue service to multiple airports serving a single point would impose undue costs on covered carriers." The agency added, however, that "nothing in this order prevents carriers from serving multiple airports at a given point, if they so choose." The Newport News airport is the only airport in Virginia affected by the DOT's order. Commercial airports in Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville and the Shenandoah Valley - most of them smaller than Newport News - are not in the footprint of a larger airport and as such are their own "points." But a handful of other airports around the country are in the same boat. The Akron-Canton Airport in Ohio, for example, is in the same "point" as a larger airport in Cleveland, the DOT ruled. The T.F. Green Airport outside of Providence, Rhode Island, falls into the same zone as Boston's Logan International Airport. On Wednesday, JetBlue announced that it's consolidating its Providence flights with Boston for eight weeks, the Providence Journal reported. American Airlines said Tuesday that it "continues to serve" both Newport News and Norfolk. When asked if that would continue in the months ahead, American spokesman Ross Feinstein wrote in an email: "Due to decreased customer demand, we have made several changes to our schedule in this rapidly changing environment. At this time, none of those changes include ending service to Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport."

A Delta Air Lines spokeswoman, Kyla T. Ross, on the other hand, released a far shorter statement: "We're reviewing the final DOT order and have no plans to share at this time." With planes flying only about 10% full these days, both airlines have already cut back service to Newport News, as airlines have to other destinations around the country. Delta had been flying three times a day to Atlanta - with connections from there to other destinations - but has cut that back to one a day, Giardino said.

American, for its part, was flying 7 flights a day to Charlotte and three to Philadelphia. But under a new schedule released this week, American now flies three times a day to Charlotte and five flights a week - less than once a day - to Philly. "On Monday we had 28 passengers - 28," **Giardino** said of the Newport News airport. "Normally this time of year, the week before Easter, we'd have 600 passengers a day." It's in the airlines' best interest to continue flying out of Newport News, he asserted. Before the coronavirus struck, **Giardino** said, "our load factor was extremely high" - meaning that planes were often packed. "When everything is normal, we have very good cost structure for airlines," he said. "We're a good value for the airline when things are going well ... So if they leave, the airlines would be walking away from a model where they are actually making more money per trip" than at other airports. **Giardino** - who has spent the better part of two years trying to bring new carriers and flights to Newport News - said he's going to work hard to keep American and Delta here. "My mandate is to maintain service and grow service," he vowed. "My job is to keep the airport going, and that's what I'm going to do."

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

March 9, 2020

Aviation academy to get new home - Critical maintenance issues at heart of move from airport to Denbigh High

Author/Byline: Matt Jones

You can tell it used to be an airport terminal when you walk around the Denbigh High School Aviation Academy. Tall windows look out onto the tarmac at Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. The gate is now the academy's cafeteria. A wind tunnel fills the room where baggage handlers once unloaded luggage. But you can tell it used to be an airport terminal in the 1950s. The heating and cooling system is failing. The roof leaks.

This summer, Newport News Public Schools plans to move the academy to a wing of Denbigh High School. Administrators say the division can't afford to take on the upkeep the building needs. The airport says it can't, either. "The building just quietly and deliberately told us it can't sustain anymore," **said Michael Giardino**, airport executive director.

The academy, which started in 1995, enrolls about 275 students who shuttle back and forth from Denbigh High School. The hands-on program focuses on piloting, aircraft maintenance, engineering and public safety. It's open to students throughout the division, and program administrator Aaron Smith says a lot of its students don't fit into traditional magnet programs. "Learning skills like this will make them very employable," Smith said while on a tour of the academy Thursday.

Senior Robert Pelfrey said he applied to the program thinking he wanted to become a pilot. He's decided that he wants to pursue computer science instead. On Thursday morning, he was working on syncing flight simulators so that multiple students could fly in the same simulation. "I still want to be a pilot, and this program really does help with that," Pelfrey said. "But that's not going to be my job."

Getting hands-on learning means that the building is filled with specialized equipment. There are rooms with aeronautical charts, flight simulators, 3D-printers and virtual reality headsets. In the air frame lab, there are two partially assembled planes that students are practicing on. "You cannot figure this out in a textbook - how to do safety wire or how to really (work) sheet metal," Smith said. "You get an understanding, but until you really make it engaging, it's not going to stick."

The 'straw that broke the camel's back'

The division leases over 27,000 square feet of the terminal. Their most recent lease with the Peninsula Airport Commission expired in 2016, but it's been extended several times. The division started negotiating a new lease in May 2018, according to a presentation given to the Newport News School Board in November. But even then, maintenance costs were piling up. The building racked up \$231,000 during the 2019 fiscal year, on top of another \$448,000 since

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July 2007. Photos in the presentation show some of the issues. Parts of the roof are rusted through, patched together over the years. In one photo, the walls are streaked white where water leaked from the ceiling. Leaks have damaged the ceiling and recycling bins are being used to catch water in another photo.

Although the terminal has a kitchen, division spokeswoman Michelle Price said the school hasn't been able to use it recently. Lunches have to be brought in instead. Because of the building's HVAC troubles, there are portable AC units in some of the academy's rooms. "I wouldn't call it an amazing fix, but I would say that it's something that's essential," Smith said. "You want the kids comfortable when they're learning, just like you want the teacher comfortable."

The school's initial lease, which costs about \$91,000 a year, required the airport commission to pay for repairs costing over \$5,000. The "straw that broke the camel's back," according to **Giardino**, was a piece of HVAC equipment. Although the division leases over 27,000 square feet, it only uses about 16,000 square feet. The HVAC unit mostly served vacant parts of the building. The airport, which has faced headwinds since the 2017 People's Express scandal, couldn't justify spending the hundreds of thousands on a replacement that wouldn't generate income. But that also knocked out heating and cooling to part of the school's space. "The relationship we have with all our tenants is the same," **Giardino** said. "My mandate is to make the airport sustainable, and things have to pay for themselves. Unfortunately, it's not a good value to put more money into that."

A walk-through by school division staff in September found that critical maintenance problems ran deeper: drywall needed to be replaced, ceiling tiles fixed and mold cleaned up. Since the division and airport decided not to continue extending the lease, the division has been paying for maintenance but not the lease. According to Price, it had spent about \$316,000 on the building as of November. "The building's tired," **Giardino** said. "The airport commission cannot legally take on any more funding towards the sustainment of the building."

Planning for a move

The move to Denbigh is expected to cost over \$1.5 million. The division plans to demolish some existing modular classrooms at Denbigh and add a new eight-classroom unit, which staff estimated in November would cost \$550,000. The academy's new home will be a self-contained wing in the northwest corner of the school, which currently houses foreign language and special-needs classes along with Denbigh's JROTC program. All the teachers will have to move. The division will continue to lease a hangar at the airport, according to Price. Students will still do things like practice taxiing and working on planes there.

Plans presented to the board call for the JROTC room to become the new air frame lab. The wind tunnel will go alongside it, with a control room. Lockers in the hallway will be relocated, and the wing will have its own office. Unlike the terminal, there's no Federal Aviation Administration-required off-limits areas. The wing offers 16,167 square feet, compared to the 16,204 square feet the academy takes up in the old terminal. "It's not one long hallway," Smith said. "It's in closer walking quarters." The Newport News School Board will get an update in April about the

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

project. Work is planned to start June 16 and finish Aug. 18, with the space ready for classes by the end of August.

In 2016, around the time the last lease expired, the division and airport commission signed an agreement outlining a proposal for a new building. That 50,000-square-foot building on airport land would've cost \$22 million. The plan was to pay for it with state, airport and private money to transform it into the "Virginia Center of Aeronautics." Negotiations on the project stopped during the People Express Airlines scandal, which led to leadership changes, a criminal investigation and **Giardino's** hiring.

According to **Giardino**, he is still working with the city, schools and economic development authority to find a place on campus for a school. "The focus of the academy is aviation, number one, and we're the community's airport," **Giardino** said. "Number two, it's got a two-decade history of being at the airport. I think that students and parents appreciate that."

Smith is optimistic about the future of the program. He hopes to see enrollment grow, more certifications offered to students and more advanced equipment. "Great things are going to be happening in the next five to 10 years," Smith said as he walked out of the future air frame lab at Denbigh. "I envision it. I just see it. The beauty of it is you don't know what it's going to be yet."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
January 20, 2020

Get "REAL ID" by Oct. 1 - or you might not be able to fly

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

You landed a great deal on airplane tickets for a family vacation this fall. So you show up at the airport on Oct. 1 with your spouse and three excited kids and lots of luggage. But when you hand over your boarding pass and driver's license at the security checkpoint, the Transportation Security Administration screener cuts your vacation short: because you don't have a "REAL ID" - a new state driver's license that meets new federal security standards. "The officer looks at your license and says, 'Oh, I'm sorry, that license is no longer valid for you to get through the checkpoint,' " said Lisa Farbstein, a TSA spokeswoman. "So now you are officially between a rock and a hard place."

It's a scenario that airlines, airports and the TSA fear could happen to millions of Americans when the new rules take effect Oct. 1. Travelers 18 years old and older won't be able to fly unless they have either a REAL ID, an active passport or limited other forms of identification. "It could cost you thousands of dollars because you could have non-refundable tickets, perhaps you've got a prepaid rental car, prepaid hotel," Farbstein said at an event Friday at the Newport News airport to push for awareness about REAL ID. "It's just not something you can talk your way out of." There are about eight months left for people to get the new ID cards.

"We are facing a reality that time is ticking, and a date is coming," said **Michael Giardino**, the executive director of Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. "It's very important to us as part of that customer experience that people have seamless travel ... and that includes with the checkpoints," **Giardino** said. "Sometimes we're resistant to change as human beings, and for whatever reason people have waited this long. But again, time is ticking."

Congress passed the REAL ID Act in 2005 following a recommendation by the 9/11 Commission. The 2005 law establishes new standards for the identifications accepted by federal agencies, with states across the country now issuing the REAL IDs. The new cards have security features embedded into them. They are marked by stars, typically sporting the symbol in the upper right. "We don't want to inhibit anybody's travel," said Chuck Burke, the TSA's security director for Central Virginia airports. "We want them to fly. We want them to travel in ease, comfort and everything else like that. And so the sooner you get the REAL IDs, the better it will be." And Burke warned: "There is no plan, no process, to extend that deadline."

Aside from passports, certain other documents will be deemed acceptable in lieu of a REAL ID. Those include some Defense Department identification cards, a Department of Homeland Security "trusted traveler" card, foreign passports, a tribal ID card, among others. But most people will need either valid passports or REAL IDs. In Virginia, the new IDs are being issued at Department of Motor Vehicles offices around the state. Because January is traditionally a slow month at the agency, "now is a great time to visit," DMV spokeswoman Brandy Brubaker said at

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Friday's event. "The sooner the better," she said. "We expect a rush of customers to visit us as we get closer to the enforcement date." Virginia was among the states that made REAL ID an optional - not automatic - part of getting new driver's licenses and renewals. The cards aren't needed for travel on trains, buses or boats. But people who travel by plane - even if it's a rarity - "will want to have one," state officials say. "Even if you don't think you're going to use it, it's probably a good idea to have one," Brubaker said. "My parents don't fly, but they'll probably get one in case they win a trip on "Kelly and Ryan" or something." Brubaker said about 40% of Virginia's 6 million driver's license holders - or about 2.6 million people - will likely need REAL IDs. A few weeks ago, she said, Virginia just passed the 1 million mark, with 175,000 of those issued in Hampton Roads. That means 1.6 million people need the cards and don't yet have them.

To get a REAL ID, you must visit the DMV in person rather than online - and bring documents showing your identity, Social Security number and two proofs of Virginia residence. That could mean, for example, a birth certificate or valid U.S. passport; a Social Security card or tax documents, such as a W-2, showing the full number; and a valid driver's license with the current street address plus a recent utility bill. If your legal name is different from what's on the documents, Brubaker said, the name change can be proven by a marriage license or court divorce decree. Virginia birth certificates and state marriage licenses are generally available through the DMV, while new and replacement Social Security cards can be obtained at ssa.gov. The DMV charges a \$10 surcharge for getting the REAL ID on top of other fees. For more information about the required documents, go to dmvNOW.com.

"Why make it hard?" **Giardino** urged the public on Friday. "I have mine. It's right here, and it was easy to get and very simple ... We want the travel experience for our passengers to be seamless ... Why wait? Get this done. It's fast. It's simple and easy to do."

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael A. Giardino** is listed below.]

https://airportscouncil.org/press_release/avls-lew-bleiweis-becomes-airports-council-chair/

Airport's Council International
Press Releases
January 2, 2020

AVL's Lew Bleiweis Becomes Airports Council Chair

Author/Byline: Unknown

In addition to welcoming a new Chair, ACI-NA also announced the election of several new Board members and Policy Council members, including:

Michael A. Giardino, Executive Director of the Peninsula Airport Commission was elected Chair of the Small Hub Airports Committee and will join the U.S. Policy Council in that role.

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

April 28, 2019

Newport News airport takes over trailer park - 96-lot park will bring new revenue stream to airport

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport soon will take over the day-to-day operations of its on-site mobile home park. The move - which begins Wednesday - adds to the list of revenue streams that airport workers now are handling in-house rather than farming out. The airport already runs its own parking lot, which is one of the facility's biggest moneymakers. Parking is projected to net the airport more than \$1.46 million after expenses this year, and fund about a quarter of the airport's annual budget.

In 2017, the Peninsula Airport Commission ousted its former food and beverage provider, terminating a long-term lease. Airport staffers now directly run the new terminal restaurant, Take PHFlight. The restaurant is expected to net more than \$100,000 in the fiscal year that ends in June, Finance Director Renee Ford said. That's more than twice the \$48,000 the airport netted on food services in the private vendor's last full year of operation, she said.

Now the Patrick Henry Mobile Home Village also will be run directly by the airport. Among the reasons: The trailer park is close to being in the red this year, and the airport thinks it can do better. That's an important consideration, given that the airport has a tight budget as of late caused by fewer commercial flights in and out of the airfield. "We have to improve the safety and security over there (at the trailer park) and No. 2, it can't be a drain on the system," airport Executive Director **Mike Giardino** said. "We don't want to run a business that's not at least breaking even."

The trailer park was expected to bring in \$455,000 in rents in the year that ends June 30. With about \$433,000 in projected expenses, that was supposed to net the airport a modest \$22,000 for the year. Instead - with rent collections about 7 % off - the trailer park is barely making ends meet: The park so far has netted only \$1,070 for the fiscal year, and won't come close to the \$22,000 that initially was projected, airport numbers show. By contrast, Kentucky Farms - a privately run horse pasture on airport land - brings in \$42,600 in annual rent on virtually zero expenses.

The mobile home park, visible through trees from the airport's parking lot, now has 96 trailers, according to a Daily Press count. That's down from 140 mobile homes in 2008, and far fewer than the 250 trailers on the site in the 1990s. Rent, at \$399 a month, includes the land as well as water and sewer fees, with tenants maintaining their own trailers and paying for electricity.

Airport officials said at a February board meeting that commissioners are concerned with an outside contractor's management - "or lack thereof" - of the trailer park. One commissioner said the trailer park was being "neglected" by the firm, that residents deserved better, and that rents

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

weren't coming in as they should. **Giardino** fired off a hard-hitting letter in February to Tidewater Premier, the Smithfield company that has run the park since 2010. But instead of vowing to make things right, he said, "They wrote us a letter back saying they quit."

The airport got no response to a request for proposals last fall to run the trailer park. And only two companies responded to a second RFP this year that had an April 3 closing date. One of the responses, **Giardino** said, was a one-page letter from a local real estate company "that we didn't contemplate." The only true response, he said, was from Caldwell Thompson Co., a Fredericksburg real estate firm. "We decided not to select them because they didn't meet our criteria," **Giardino** said. "They were just not a good fit in our judgement. No. 1, they were not local, and it would be nice to have a local management company ... And we are satisfied that we can run the operation right now."

The airport itself has long maintained the sewer and water lines into the park, as well as the trees, streets and street lights. The outside vendor deals with the tenants, collects the rents and handles trash collection. Viveca Munger, a paralegal recently hired as the airport's director of business development and corporate analytics, will now run the trailer park. She will also look for ways to save costs and put the operation more firmly into the black, Ford said.

Giardino said he's looking forward to a good working relationship with residents, saying the airport will host town hall meetings and have residents sign new leases. "We are a good landlord to our tenants," **Giardino** said. "We are a good landlord to our rental cars companies, the airlines and (others). Everyone is happy with our landlordship. That's what I do, I'm a landlord. I manage the facility on a landlord-tenant basis." If the airport must evict people, he said, it will do that, too. "We will take appropriate action, whatever that is," **Giardino** said. "It will be a very transactional relationship."

Peninsula Airport Commission Chairman Sharon Scott said she doesn't have a problem with airport employees running what she jokingly calls the "mobile home estates." "I don't see it as a being a herculean task," she said. "It's basically collecting rent and making sure the grounds are (kept up). I don't see it as being extremely time consuming." Scott predicted the airport eventually would have an outside vendor handle the work, and she voiced concern that the recent RFPs might not have been seen by many local real estate firms.

In response, **Giardino** said the RFP was posted on eVA, Virginia's primary and well-known procurement website. It was also advertised in the media, he said, and his staff contacted many local firms directly. He said he and his staff are on the lookout for new ways of doing business that could help the airport's bottom line. "Everything is open," **Giardino** said. "We are doing really well (on parking), but if someone would make an offer to run the parking, we would take a look at that ... It's just a matter of staffing, and how you want to run the business."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)
April 11, 2019

Peninsula Airport settles lawsuit - Former executive director given \$300,000 to end defamation case, avoid a jury trial

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Peninsula Airport Commission's insurance firm has agreed to pay \$300,000 to settle a defamation lawsuit by the past head of the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. The agreement with former executive director Ken Spirito was arrived at during a court-ordered settlement conference Tuesday, airport executive director **Mike Giardino** said. The deal - to be voted on by airport commissioners today - came a week before a jury trial was expected to begin in U.S. District Court in Newport News. The deal came six days after U.S. District Judge Henry Coke Morgan Jr. issued a key ruling in which he tossed part of Spirito's case but allowed much of it to proceed to trial.

Giardino said the six-member Peninsula Airport Commission will meet Thursday morning to vote on the agreement. "This ... settlement agreement shall be subject to the adoption of a public resolution of the (airport commission) approving the transaction," said a memorandum outlining the settlement terms. Under the deal, Spirito agrees to give up "any and all claims" against the airport, while the airport also gives up all future claims - "known and unknown" - against its former executive. The \$300,000 must be paid within five days.

In his lawsuit, Spirito had contended that airport employees and a commission member had defamed his character over his shredding of documents at the airport in early 2017. At the time of the shredding, the state's Department of Transportation was conducting an investigation into the airport. Spirito said the documents he was shredding had nothing to do with the state's investigation - and that texts between employees gave a false implication of impropriety. He said he was simply shredding "old, duplicate airline presentations" on one occasion, and that another allegation of shredding was simply made up.

Tuesday's settlement conference - with U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert J. Krask presiding - led to a deal between Spirito, the airport's insurance carrier, Chubb Insurance, and lawyers from both sides. **Giardino** and airport lawyers also attended. "It wasn't the call of the (airport commission) - it was the insurer's call," **Giardino** said of the deal. "We have insurance for a reason, and this is how it went. ... People do risk assessments, and that's what insurance companies do."

As for the airport, **Giardino** said, "More of our concern is that we're past this and moving forward." Even though the money is coming from insurance, **Giardino** said attorneys agreed that it made sense - for the sake of public transparency - that commissioners vote on the deal. "Instead of just saying, 'The insurance company took care of it,' and it goes in the file, the consensus was that it would be a good act to publicly endorse it," he said.

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Spirito's attorney, David L. Littel of Virginia Beach, declined an immediate comment, saying he would speak about the suit Thursday. Spirito - who led the airport for eight years before being fired in May 2017 - could not immediately be reached.

The former executive initially filed a defamation lawsuit against the airport commission and the employees in Williamsburg/James City County Circuit Court in early 2018. But a Williamsburg judge tossed the case, saying in part that the defendants did not act with "reckless disregard" for the truth, a crucial part of defaming a public official. Spirito's lawyer took the case to federal court, contending that the implication that he was doing something wrong destroyed his aviation career and "shattered" his reputation.

Named as defendants were the Peninsula Airport Commission, the Daily Press, airport accounting specialist Lisa M. Ortiz, airport finance and administration director E. Renee Ford, former airport supervising janitor Wilmer K. Thomas Jr., Newport News City Councilwoman - and airport commissioner - Sharon P. Scott.

Morgan tossed the case against the Daily Press earlier this year, granting a motion from the newspaper's lawyers that the paper accurately reported on the findings of a state audit report. The judge dismissed all of the individual defendants on March 19, leaving the Peninsula Airport Commission as the only defendant.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
December 17, 2018

W.M. Jordan to build \$3M private hangar at Newport News airport - After contentious negotiations, deal struck for new building at airport for local firm's two planes

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

After months of sometimes-heated debate over the \$3 million project, one of the Peninsula's most prominent companies has landed a deal to build a new private airplane hangar at the Newport News airport. The Peninsula Airport Commission voted 4-0 to approve a long-term lease allowing the W.M. Jordan Co. to build a nearly 15,000-square-foot building on about 1.5 acres of airport land. The new hangar, connected to a tarmac and runway, will park the company's two planes - a brand new \$18 million Cessna Citation Latitude that's used to shuttle around company executives and an older Beechcraft King Air 350. The deal brings to a close more than seven months of negotiations.

W.M. Jordan, a Newport News-based construction management firm, first approached officials at Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport in March on its plan for what it called a new "first-class" hangar, near one for Smithfield Foods. But then-company president John Lawson II contended in a hard-hitting letter to airport commissioners in June that the airport was dragging its feet on the lease deal and failing to operate in a business-friendly way.

"It's finally done," Lawson said last week. "It ended up the way I thought it should have happened back in April or May; it just took a lot longer." He said "it's to everybody's advantage" to have the new hangar, jobs and taxes in Newport News. "I could have built it in Norfolk, I could build it in Chesapeake," Lawson said. But I said, 'Don't make me do that.' I wanted to build it in my hometown."

The 15-year lease, with two five-year options, was signed Nov. 29. A W.M. Jordan subsidiary, Air Jordan LLC, will construct the building and then pay the airport to lease it. The company will pay \$20,357 - or \$1,696 a month - for the first year, with the cost going up 2 percent annually. Other adjustments can be made with changes to the fair market value.

The city of Newport News stands to collect about \$60,000 in annual airplane property taxes on the Citation Latitude next year. lease tax on the building. "It's great news - it shows that we're open for business, as they say," said Airport Executive Director **Mike Giardino**.

W.M. Jordan bought the new airplane in early 2018, Lawson said, because it now does business in three states and executives need the plane to visit job sites and meet designers and customers. But it's been a logistical hassle to use the new aircraft, he said, because it's in a hangar at the Richmond International Airport, even as the executives and pilot work out of the company's headquarters in Newport News. Lawson, who stepped down from day-to-day management of W.M. Jordan in August but is still executive chairman, said the company has already purchased all the materials needed for the new hangar, with construction to begin in January. "We think we

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

can knock it out in five months - by the end of May," he said. With the deal done, W.M. Jordan's attorney on the lease - Lindsey A. Carney from Patton, Wornom, Hatten and Diamonstein - is expected to finally take her seat on the airport commission. Newport News' City Council appointed Carney to the board earlier this year, but she's been waiting until the deal was done to begin in that role.

Lawson contended in his June letter that the airport was giving his company the runaround. "This is a really simple deal," he told the Daily Press at the time. "This is about as simple a construction and lease deal as you can possibly do." At a heated airport board meeting the next day, board member Jay Joseph said he found Lawson's complaints "legitimate," and pressed **Giardino** and the airport's interim attorney, James S. McNider III, on why it was taking so long.

McNider and **Giardino** said the letter was unwarranted, and that they were trying to work out a deal. They said they wanted to improve airport leases and couldn't just take an old one and rehash it, with **Giardino** showing board members a list of the communications between the sides. Lawson said he met one-on-one with **Giardino** a couple weeks later "to express my frustration at the delays" and reiterated that he wanted a "simple deal" and wanted Newport News to get the taxes. Soon thereafter, **Giardino** switched out the airport's lawyers on the project.

While **Giardino** said he was satisfied with McNider's work on the lease, "I saw how things were going," he said. "McNider took a beating by the commission, and he ends up being the fall guy for a lot of stuff." The executive director said he asked a Boston law firm, Anderson & Kreiger, to finish out the deal.

The commission approved the new lease contingent on getting a pending permit from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. The board signed off on spending \$19,200 on "wetlands credits" to make up for the destruction of about half an acre of wetlands on the site. Airport officials said a state grant will pay for 80 percent of the \$19,200. W.M. Jordan will also build a small berm near the hangar to prevent adjacent wetlands from draining out.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

August 1, 2018

County covets land eyed for conservation - State wants easement on plot near airport that York says is prime for development

Author/Byline: Marie Albiges

The state is getting pushback from York County on a proposal to designate more than 330 acres of land for conservation near Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. York County Administrator Neil Morgan told the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation in mid-July he opposed putting conservation easements on about 200 of the 337.7 acres off Old Denbigh Boulevard near Harwoods Mill Reservoir because the land is designated for long-term economic development and should remain as such. The two parcels at 108 Elm Drive and 420 Oriana Road - located north of the airport - are zoned for limited industrial business.

The state wants to protect the land permanently and has acquired grant money - given as part of the funds from Dominion Energy to mitigate the impact of the power line across the James River at Skiffes Creek - to buy the land from its current owner, the Peninsula Airport Commission, which governs the airport. Morgan said if that happens, any potential tax revenue to York County disappears - and the county doesn't have a lot of taxable land. It also doesn't collect taxes from the airport commission on this land.

Watershed property takes up more than 10 percent of the gross land area, and federally owned property eliminates slightly less than 50 percent of the county's taxable land. "At this point, it's just more of the principal of, we don't have a lot of taxable undeveloped land, and we're not excited about the state agency coming along and buying it from the airport and then taking that possibility off the table forever," he said.

The county spent \$35,700 to determine that 140 of the 200 acres would not be subject to any "unusual" environmental restrictions, and Morgan said the site had recently been identified as a regional economic development "mega-site" for Hampton Roads by the Planning District Commission. The county's Economic Development Authority was in negotiations to purchase the land from the airport commission in 2016, but Morgan said that fell through.

For the airport commission's part, Executive Director **Michael Giardino** said nothing's been finalized, and the commission is considering the sale of the property to the conservation department. "It is a huge question to ask, 'What do we want to do with that parcel?' " he said. "We want that parcel to support our core mission to be able to run the airport."

Jason Bulluck, director of the Virginia Natural Heritage Program at the Department of Conservation and Recreation, said without York County's support, the preservation project would have to be reconfigured to exclude the land the county wants to use for economic development. The project involves the state acquiring other parcels, such as one located in York County at 700 Country Lane near National Colonial Historical Park, for preservation. Morgan

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

said he wasn't opposed to designating that land for conservation. Newport News Waterworks has also donated matching land with conservation easements for the project. "There's not any hard feelings or ill will," Bulluck said of the county's opposition. "We just realize that now there needs to be some adjustment apparently. That's what we're hoping we can find common ground on." Morgan proposed a meeting with representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Peninsula Airport Commission and the city of Newport News, and Bulluck said he would agree to a meeting, either in person or over the phone.

"We want the airport to do well," Morgan said. "Newport News wants the airport to do well. We want to protect the watershed. We do have to look out for our finances and the region has a shortage of large sites for the economy of the future. I just think we ought to not just kind of frivolously let one escape when we have the opportunity to take a long-term approach."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

July 1, 2018

Airport's legal expenses continue mounting - People Express, defamation suit part of \$900K bill

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport has racked up nearly \$900,000 in legal expenses - and counting - over the past year and a half as it's dealt with a wide range of significant legal issues. There's been a lot to contend with: Potential litigation that stemmed from the Peninsula Airport Commission's \$5 million loan guarantee to People Express Airlines. A pending defamation lawsuit filed by the airport's former executive director. Litigation with the airport's former food services provider. And lots of other issues, too.

The fee clock typically ticks at a rate of \$375 an hour now, but it's been as high as \$950 an hour for one attorney. The clock runs for everything from researching issues, writing legal briefs and attending court hearings to 10-minute phone calls and five-minute emails. It's not uncommon that two airport-paid lawyers talk with each other about the cases - both of them billing the airport separately for the same phone call, records show. All told, the airport dished out \$783,361 in legal fees in 2017, according to attorney invoices obtained by the Daily Press under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. That's 16 times the annual average of \$46,685 that the airport spent between 2009 and 2016. The 2017 numbers are more than twice the prior eight years combined. And the bills are still coming in. The airport has spent \$105,471 on legal fees in the early part of 2018 - bringing the total paid out during the past 18 months to \$888,832, the documents show. But the airport's main interim lawyer hasn't yet billed the airport for March through June. When those invoices come due, the charges are expected to easily surpass \$900,000 for the stretch.

'A lot of money'

Airport Executive Director **Michael Giardino**, who took the airport's helm in November, acknowledges that the legal fees have made making ends meet more difficult. "It's a lot of money," he said. "It's a strain on the budget, and we want it to go away. Because it hurts us. It impacts us. It's all local money, and it's revenue of the airport, so obviously that hurts."

At the same time, **Giardino** calls the legal fees "a necessary evil" to sort out the various legal morasses. "These things cost money," he said. "Work costs money, litigation costs money, depositions cost money. ... The attorneys don't do it for free, and we don't expect them to." "My first day on the job, we got a draft lawsuit from the former executive director," he said. "Rather shocking." A case involving the airport restaurant provider was well underway when **Giardino** arrived, as was another involving TowneBank. And when he interviewed for the job in September, he said, the Federal Aviation Administration had just sent an inquiry letter to the airport two days earlier. While several of the legal disputes are still ongoing, **Giardino** points out that one of biggest legal battles - the airport's claim against TowneBank and the airport's former law firm over the People Express deal - has been settled out of court. That \$2 million settlement

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

was reached in December with TowneBank and Jones Blechman Woltz and Kelly, with the deal passing muster with former Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne. He's the man who - after a hard-hitting state audit into the airport - told the airport's board last year to go after the \$4.5 million in taxpayer money paid to the bank in the People Express deal. Also, **Giardino** said, the FAA inquiry is moving toward a positive resolution. "We have the right to defend ourselves in all of these cases, and I think we've proven ourselves relatively successful," he said. "We are going to rigorously defend ourselves." And though the legal payments were far lower in past years, **Giardino** said, "Look where it got us." Yes, "hindsight is 20/20," he said, but perhaps more sound legal advice in the past might have prevented some of the issues now.

Impact on airport

The lawyer fees are paid out of the airport's operations budget, which amounts to about \$8 million annually. That's derived from airport revenue - such as parking fees, and rents to car rental companies, airlines and other businesses. At several recent Peninsula Airport Commission meetings, airport Finance Director Renee Ford has brought up the attorney fees as creating tighter margins or even causing some monthly losses. "That is the main thing that's causing our financial results to look the way they do," Ford said.

Over the past 18 months, Sharon Scott, a Newport News city councilwoman and member of the airport commission, has at times questioned the rising legal fees, saying she was "flabbergasted" by them and calling them "exorbitant." Though she hasn't stepped in to stop the payments, she said she plans to focus on the issue more heavily when she becomes the commission's chairman on Sunday. On Thursday, the board - led in part by Scott - told **Giardino** to issue a new Request for Proposals for a new permanent airport attorney. Though several law firms applied for the work under a prior RFP last August, a hire was never made.

James S. McNider III, the Hampton lawyer who's been the airport's interim attorney since March 2017, said the airport's legal fees - including the \$437,079 that he's billed - have been worth it. "The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is a \$100 million asset in a highly regulated industry," McNider said. "Legal services are an integral part of a properly functioning airport. We have been under attack for over a year. Litigation is expensive." Last year, the airport "got a sizable recovery (in the TowneBank settlement) that then had the ripple effect of alleviating the FAA and the VDOT audit inquiries," he said. "Aubrey Layne put the Peninsula Airport Commission on terms, and we produced." But the spiking attorney fees don't sit well with Tom McDermott, the Hampton restaurant owner involved in a heated legal dispute with the airport over how much he should be paid for his capital investments into the facility over the years.

The case, McDermott said, could have been settled long ago. But he contends that McNider has extended the case by filing "frivolous motions" and refusing to sit down and talk, leading to more money for the lawyer. "The attorney fees have been outrageous," McDermott said. "Why would they never want to sit down and at least discuss this? He's making bank. If they had a qualified firm, this would have been settled a year ago." Asked for a response to McDermott's comments, McNider said: "The (Peninsula Airport Commission) will continue to defend its

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

legitimate interests. This is standard fare - when someone isn't getting what they want, they attack the lawyer."

Rundown of legal issues.

Here are some of the biggest legal hurdles the airport has faced in the past year:

Dispute with bank and law firm. The Peninsula Airport Commission - the six-member board that runs the airport - had backed a \$5 million loan to startup People Express Airlines in 2014. When the airline collapsed a couple months later, the airport paid \$4.5 million in taxpayer money to TowneBank to cover the debt. Last year, the airport attempted to claw back that money from the bank and the airport's former law firm, Jones Blechman. The two sides hammered out a settlement in December. The bank and law firm jointly agreed to pay the airport \$2 million: \$1.65 million in cash and a reduction of \$350,000 in the the airport's future interest payments on a prior bank-issued bond.

Dispute with restaurant company. That company, New Dominion Clubs, disputed with the Peninsula Airport Commission over its decision in late 2016 to terminate the restaurant's long-term lease. Though a judge ruled in early 2017 that the airport was within its rights to do so, there's still a pending dispute over how much the airport needs to pay New Dominion for its back capital investments. The company says it's owed \$815,000, while the airport says it hasn't seen adequate backing for that. That case is still pending.

Lawsuit by former airport leader. The airport's former executive director, Ken Spirito, is suing the Peninsula Airport Commission and several employees. He accuses them of defaming his character during a state audit of the airport before he was fired in May 2017. Though a Williamsburg Circuit Court judge tossed the lawsuit, Spirito has filed a nearly identical case in federal court, also adding the Daily Press as a defendant. That case is pending.

Joint federal and state investigation. Last June, the Virginia State Police, the Internal Revenue Service's criminal investigation division and U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General began investigating the airport. Some witnesses have testified before a federal grand jury in Newport News as part of that case. Federal Aviation Administration inquiry. Last year, the FAA began looking into the airport over spending issues, with the case having the potential to affect future federal airport grants. That inquiry is still pending.

Sandy Wanner, who led the airport on an interim basis for eight months last year, said the sudden termination of the airport's legal representation in March 2017 led a Newport News Circuit Court judge to "order us to get an attorney" quickly because of pressing timelines in the restaurant dispute. That came after the airport commission ended its long-term relationship with Jones Blechman lawyer Herbert V. "Bert" Kelly Jr. "And then while that was unfolding, the (VDOT) audit started to unfold with all of its issues," Wanner said. "And then as it continued, there was the issue of how we were going to try to meet the state's expectations by getting financial repayment from any number of sources. ... Everything just started to take over. All of the events were just cascading down."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Four law firms accounted for the \$888,832 in legal fees over the past 18 months, airport records show. Jones Blechman Woltz & Kelly: \$96,389. The Newport News law firm was let go as the airport's law firm in March 2017 after the People Express scandal erupted. But before that happened, the firm billed the airport \$96,389 for hours worked over a nearly three-month stretch between Jan. 1 and mid-March. Kelly and another lawyer with the firm billed at \$400 an hour, while some others billed at lesser rates.

James S. McNider III: \$437,079. The Hampton lawyer was hired in March 2017 to step in immediately. He was hired on an interim basis - with the airport's board not following its normal competitive bidding rules. That came after the Newport News judge ordered the airport to get immediate counsel in the restaurant case. That "interim" relationship has now lasted more than 15 months. At Peninsula Airport Commission's board meetings, McNider has sat in the attorney's seat that had been held for decades by Herbert Kelly Jr. and his father before him. McNider has billed the airport for 1,068 hours worked since March 2017, documents show. At an average rate of about \$395 an hour, that comes to \$420,707. (His hourly rate was reduced from \$400 to \$375 in November). Other work has been performed by McNider's paralegal, at \$80 an hour. McNider has not yet submitted his bills for March through June of this year, airport officials say.

Hausfeld LLP/Walter D. Kelley Jr.: \$312,964. In June 2017, the Peninsula Airport Commission hired Walter D. Kelley Jr., an attorney with Hausfeld LLP, a Washington, D.C., law firm. His job: To help claw back the \$4.5 million from TowneBank and Jones Blechman. Kelley, a former federal district judge in Norfolk, was initially hired under a flat fee of \$30,000 to do some initial work for an undisclosed number of hours. The PAC then hired him in July 2017 for continued work - at Washington, D.C., rates. Kelley was first hired at \$945 an hour, which was adjusted in November to the "discount rate" of \$850 an hour. As with McNider, Kelley's hire was made without competitive bidding. Hausfeld tallied \$273,910 for 330 billable hours. That comes in at \$828 per hour when some work by lesser-priced attorneys is factored in. Hausfeld billed the airport \$9,053 in other expenses, to include \$2,773 in Kelley's travel costs, such as mileage back and forth to Newport News, hotel costs and meals.

Anderson Kreiger LLP: \$42,400. The airport commission hired this Boston-based firm in late 2017 to help the airport respond to the FAA's inquiry. The work included 122 billable hours, clocked at an average hourly rate of \$337. Conrad Shumadine: This Willcox & Savage attorney in Norfolk was hired by the airport's insurance firm, Chubb Insurance, to defend the commission in the Spirito lawsuit. But Chubb's payments aren't public records. McNider has separately billed the airport for significant hours on the Spirito defamation lawsuit, though McNider says Shumadine has spent far more time on it. Walt Kelley has also billed for some hours on that case.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

May 19, 2018

A pivot on air service strategy - Rather than chase discount carriers, airport will push big airlines to add more flights

Author/Byline: Dave Ress

Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport is steering a new course to boost traffic, turning away from its longtime strategy of wooing low-fare airlines. The new effort will instead focus on the Big Three airlines, two of which already serve the airport, said Executive Director **Michael Giardino**, detailing the approach in a working session of the Peninsula Airport Commission. The aim is for more frequent flights and better connections, direct and indirect, to destinations sought by Peninsula travelers. Easier travel for Peninsula residents is the airport's main mission, even if this market might seem smaller than Richmond and South Hampton Roads - where the commission had long wanted to attract customers with low-fare airlines, **Giardino** said.

Delta and American - two of the Big Three - currently operate 10 flights daily to Atlanta, Charlotte and Philadelphia from Newport News. **Giardino** is working to convince those two airlines to add more flights to those cities and to consider service to some of their other major hubs, such as Dallas-Fort Worth, Detroit or Minneapolis. He's also hoping to convince United - the third airline of the Big Three - to begin operating connecting flights from Newport News to Dulles and the airline's other hubs.

Giardino is working with local businesses, including a meeting just this week with travel managers from Newport News Shipbuilding, Ferguson Enterprises and Liebherr, on a campaign to convince the big airlines that there are enough businesses here to justify adding flights. "We're leaking 1,000 passengers a day," he said. **Giardino** said Peninsula business leaders tell him they're tired of routing their employees and customers through one airport that can be an hours-long traffic jam away and another that's 65 miles up Interstate 64. "I've had one tell me they sometimes have to put people up in a hotel to make sure they can catch a flight," **Giardino** said. "We're not trying to poach anyone else's traffic, we just want ours," he said.

The airport has long focused on attracting low-fare carriers, such as Allegiant, Frontier and the now-defunct People Express, wooing them with subsidies and other incentives. Previously, AirTran operated a discount service for many years as the airport's financial mainstay. Allegiant, Frontier and People Express dropped service in 2014, while the airport's guarantee of a loan to People Express cost it \$4.5 million. **Giardino**'s new direction "marks a shift away from the low-cost carriers," said airport commissioner Rob Coleman, noting that such airlines come and go easily, and often just chase airport subsidies.

Another kind of business travelers - the ones who rely on corporate jets - have stepped up interest in the airport, said assistant executive director Melissa Cheaney. She said she's fielded four or five inquiries about hanger space or the possibility of building hangers over the past

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

couple of months. The airport has the facilities to handle much more traffic, **Giardino** said, noting that on Tuesday, it handled two flights diverted from New York's JFK International Airport. Those flights brought a unexpected 340 people for several hours to Newport News. They kept the airport commission's restaurant humming, filled trash bins to the brim "and the next day, you wouldn't have known they'd been there; the staff's work made things look better than before," **Giardino** said. The airport's push to expand traffic will also urge Peninsula travelers to take another look at flying from Newport News.

"I've been around, I've heard the rumbling and grumbling about fares," **Giardino** said. While the most recent federal survey, as of last fall, shows average fares at Newport News are somewhat higher than Norfolk or Richmond, airport marketing efforts going forward plan to focus on asking Peninsula travelers whether a \$15 or \$20 difference is really worth the travel time of going to another airport, marketing director Jessica Wharton said.

The airport's finance director, Renee Ford, presented a proposed budget calling for a roughly 4 percent increase in revenue, mostly from proposed increases in landing fees and terminal rents. Landing fees and the portion of terminal rents based on the number of passengers an airline carries are still well below half of what they probably should be to cover airfield and terminal operating costs, she said.

They are significantly below the fees and rents at **Giardino's** old airport, in Rochester, N.Y., where, for instance, Allegiant paid landing fees amounting to \$1,200 a flight, compared to the \$300 that Newport News charged in what turned out to be a vain attempt for long-term service.

Ford's proposed budget calls for a 2.6-percent increase in spending, despite a hefty increase of nearly 25 percent for repairs and maintenance, as much of the airport's aging equipment runs past warranty expiration dates. But a sharp drop in legal expenses, which this year boosted spending on all outside services to \$1.15 million, up from a budgeted \$590,000, should help the commission hold the line on spending.

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Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

March 27, 2018

Airport board to hire consultant - Company's goal is to gain more airline traffic locally

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The Peninsula Airport Commission on Thursday agreed to allow its executive director to negotiate with an aviation consulting firm to help in trying to land more airline traffic out of Newport News. The board voted unanimously to allow **Michael Giardino**, the executive director of Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport, to negotiate a contract of up to \$80,000 with Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, Inc., of Springfield, Ill. It would be for a one-year renewable contract to perform passenger traffic studies and help airport officials in making marketing pitches to airlines. The vote was 5-0, with one member absent. "They will help us to get the data analysis, message it properly and connect us where we need to get connected to get those wins we know we deserve," **Giardino** told board members before the vote.

While he said the airport's past executive director selected aviation consultants in an "ad hoc fashion" - going with various firms for such work - **Giardino** said he prefers to have one primary consultant he can turn to as needed. "I am asking for the commission to approve a 'term consultant' that we have vetted and that we think is qualified and the best fit," **Giardino** said. "We want to enter into a relationship with someone who knows us and we can call on."

Such a service might be a bit pricier than in the past. In answer to questions from board members, Renee Ford, the airport's finance director, estimated that such consulting services in recent years have cost between \$40,000 and \$50,000 annually. **Giardino** told the board that the airport issued a Request for Proposals in recent weeks, and that three firms submitted proposals for the work: Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, also called CMT, as well as AilevonPacific and Mead & Hunt. But CMT stood out above the rest, with the firm including significant analysis of Newport News in its proposal, **Giardino** said. "They obviously did their homework when they responded, not only listing references and qualifications, but they actually took a deep dive into our issues at our airport and presented some proposals already," he said.

Giardino told the board that he's had prior business dealings in Rochester, N.Y., with Will Berchermann, the primary contact at CMT who would be leading the Newport News work. (**Giardino** was executive director of the Rochester airport before coming to Newport News last fall.) **Giardino** said he recused himself from the initial selection process - which he said was done by Melissa Cheaney, the airport's assistant executive director, and Jessica Minor, the airport's finance and administration manager. Cheaney told the board that CMT was the best fit. "They were all highly qualified, but CMT provided that detailed analysis," she said. "They went above and beyond to look at our market. ... They went six steps deeper to look at our populations and industries and tourism." They provided technical graphics and "slam dunked it," she said.

Giardino said he wants CMT to do a "catchment study" and a "leakage study" to give updated numbers on what cities and counties the airport's passengers are coming from - and what

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

proportion are "leaking" to competing airports. He said he also wants the consultant to go with airport officials on visits with airlines in trying to get them to fly to Newport News, including on 15-minute "speed dating" pitches at various annual aviation conferences. **Giardino** said he will negotiate with CMT for the best deal for the airport. He said he will decide between the \$80,000 "menu of services option" the firm offers and a separate hourly rate contract.

Jessica Wharton, the airport's marketing director, said it's been a few years since the airport determined its "primary and secondary" catchment areas. "Primary is kind of like the Peninsula," she said. "Those are the passengers where we feel like they should be ours. Those are the ones we should be capturing that we don't want to leak to Norfolk or Richmond. Then there's a secondary catchment area. Let's call them battlegrounds, where they could drive really easily between us and Richmond." The key question, Wharton said, is "how do we maintain our primary (passengers). We want to maintain as many of our primary passengers from the Peninsula as we can," to "get people refocused on flying out of Newport News."

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

March 10, 2018

Elite cancels route, but says Newport News still in plans - Citing low demand, airline won't fly to Myrtle Beach

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

Elite Airways announced Friday that it has canceled plans to fly to Myrtle Beach from Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport, saying the passengers weren't there to support the flights to the South Carolina tourist destination. But Elite says it's still hoping to launch service from Newport News later this year, saying it's looking particularly at routes to Florida.

The Myrtle Beach service was to begin April 6. But bookings - on two flights per week - were not where they needed to be a month from the service's launch, the airline said. "We had high hopes for start of service at Newport News, but the demand for this particular city pairing wouldn't have been sufficient to proceed," John Pearsall, the president of Elite, based in Portland, Maine, said in a statement. "We are exploring other routes out of Newport News to popular Florida destinations later in the year, which we believe could drive stronger demand." **Michael Giardino**, the Newport News airport's executive director, said his understanding is that "bookings were light" for the Myrtle Beach route, and didn't meet the airline's threshold. "My understanding was the numbers just weren't there," **Giardino** said. "They're not going to do it for free. ... That's the nature of the business."

But **Giardino** said Myrtle Beach "was not in the portfolio" of destinations that the community and the Peninsula Airport Commission had sought in the first place. He said he's working with Elite - as well as other airlines - to launch service from Newport New to the Sunshine State and elsewhere. "I would implore any air service to fly to Florida," **Giardino** said. "But they're going to choose where they want to go. We're talking with the airlines about a lot of different places, to be honest."

Giardino said he's had "really good conversations" with Elite and believes they will still come to Newport News. "I think they believe that they can succeed here," he said. "We haven't had the service that we deserve." "But we want to make sure that whatever we start is sustainable," **Giardino** said. "That's important for everybody, whether that's Elite or anybody else. It's up to us to find the service and work with the airline. They usually offer bargain sales at first, and we advertise and do what we can. ... And the customers speak with their pocket books."

Elite first announced in December 2016 that it would fly out of Newport News. That announcement - which touted nonstop flights to Long Island, N.Y., and Newark, N.J. - promised desperately needed service at an airport that has struggled for passengers ever since AirTran Airways left the market six years ago. But a month later, Elite - citing "challenging perceptions surrounding the airport" - said it was putting its Newport News launch on hold. The airline was concerned that "various headlines" about the Newport News airport could cast a negative light on its operations, airport officials said. By that point, the Daily Press had published dozens of stories

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

on a controversy that centered in large part on the Peninsula Airport Commission's 2014 decision to guarantee a \$5 million line of credit for People Express Airlines. When that startup airline collapsed three months later, the airport quietly used \$4.5 million in taxpayer money to pay the tab. Late last year, the airport reached a \$2 million settlement with a bank and law firm.

In December, **Giardino** - who took the helm as executive director in November - told the airport's board that he had recently talked to Pearsall and had a positive vibe about Elite still coming to Newport News. "We're still on Elite's radar," he told the board. He also referenced ground-handling equipment that the Newport News airport purchased to handle such services for smaller airlines. "We may be using that equipment pretty soon," **Giardino** said.

When it first announced it was coming to Newport News in late 2016, Elite stood to get an incentive package worth up to \$1.7 million to come here, according to numbers provided by the city and airport last year. That is, Elite was to get up to \$900,000 in revenue guarantee and other incentives from a regional body that funds airline incentives - the Regional Air Service Enhancement committee. The airport offered another \$800,000 in incentives, including fee waivers and free advertising. Such incentives are still on the table, city and airport officials have said. All passengers who bought tickets on Elite Airways out of Newport News have been contacted and are being fully refunded, the company says. They can also call the airline at 877-393-2510.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Daily Press (Newport News, VA)

February 25, 2018

Putting airport 'back on the map' - New executive director says facility is finding its footing

Author/Byline: Peter Dujardin

The new executive director of Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport told the airport's board on Thursday that airlines around the country are now in an "expansion mode" and that the airport is in a good position to "put itself back on the map." **Michael Giardino**, the former Rochester, N.Y., airport executive who took the helm in Newport News in November, said the facility is getting back on its feet financially. The airport's operating budget is still "a challenge," he said. Case in point: The airport lost \$175,000 in January - the result of a traditionally slow month for passengers combined with flight cancellations from snow and continuing high attorney fees to deal with the airport's ongoing legal challenges.

But in capital projects, **Giardino** said, \$4.75 million has just arrived or will soon be coming. That cash will be used to pay bills on everything from revamped plane taxiways to a brand-new terminal security checkpoint to wetlands mitigation. The money includes \$2 million in state entitlement grand funds that will be coming in late March. That's the result of the Virginia Department of Aviation restoring the airport's annual state allotment and freeing up cash that the agency had frozen last year. The state's secretary of transportation put Newport News' entitlement grants on hold when he learned that the airport had used some of its prior grant money - typically earmarked for capital projects - to cover a loan guarantee to startup airline People Express more than three years ago.

The Newport News airport is also expected to soon get \$1.1 million from the Federal Aviation Administration to reimburse part of what the airport has already paid on a new security checkpoint at the terminal. In addition, TowneBank and the Jones, Blechman, Woltz and Kelly law firm recently paid the airport \$1.65 million in cash as part of a settlement to a months-long legal dispute over the 2014 loan guarantee to People Express. That money will go to capital projects, too. "We are now secure in our capital funding, and we can move forward," **Giardino** said. "Our capital accounts are full or will be full at the end of March. We have a plan for the future." The Department of Aviation, he said, is on board with the airport's capital projects out to 2021. Giving the Peninsula Airport Commission a rundown of his first 100 days on the job at Thursday's board meeting, **Giardino** also talked about several other highlights of his tenure. 'Getting to know the people and the place' **Giardino** said he's getting to know the airport, its staff and operations.

And Sandy Wanner, the former James City County administrator who led the airport on an interim basis for much of 2017, called on his Peninsula contacts and took **Giardino** to some 30 meetings to meet the area's movers and shakers. (The commission approved paying Wanner a certain number of hours a week to spearhead those meetings.) "Sandy was a great asset to reach out to the community, and we did that," **Giardino** said. "We made so many visits between November and the holiday that it was a blur. But in that blur, I took away a lot." Local leaders on

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

the Peninsula, he said, "are passionate about this place, and everyone has offered their support." "We had frank and honest conversations," **Giardino** added. "I have all of their mobile numbers, and I don't hesitate to call them."

Restoring public trust. Early last year, then-Virginia Secretary of Transportation Aubrey Layne froze much of the Newport News airport's annual state entitlement grants as a result of the 2014 loan guarantee to People Express. But **Giardino** said that by the time he arrived in November, the airport commission and staff had made strides to fix the relationship with the state. As a result, **Giardino** said, Layne called him two days after he got to Newport News to say he would do what he could to help. "There was a reconciliation that took place," **Giardino** told the board. "I don't think Secretary Layne would have made that phone call if it hadn't been. There was a lot that needed to be fixed. By the time I arrived, it had been fixed." Layne told the board in January that he was freeing up the annual state funds that were still frozen.

Giardino also referenced the letter the airport's board sent to the FAA on Feb. 1 - responding to the federal agency's concerns about the 2015 loan guarantee. He said he was looking forward to a positive response. "We think we are in good shape with that," **Giardino** said. The new director also said he's talked to airport staff about "loyalty and integrity." "I'm loyal, and I expect loyalty, and I expect integrity throughout," **Giardino** said. "I also expect firm, fair and consistent policies, and we've adjusted a few of those to make sure we are firm, fair and consistent." But he said there's still "a ways to go" on adjusting some of those policies.

Getting the word out about the airport. "We need to put ourselves back on the map," he told the board. "I say this five or six times a day. ... We aren't the first choice when putting an airport code or a city into the search box. It's not the thing they are typing in, and we need to change that." The airport's marketing budget is tight, he said. But "we can do it in a very efficient way," including with social media. "And just running a great airport will go a long way," he added.

Getting more air service

"I told everyone that we are focusing on the airlines that are in the building, because they are strong," **Giardino** said, referring to legacy carriers American Airlines and Delta Air Lines that already fly out of Newport News. But getting more air service here is a huge priority, too. Losing AirTran Airways in 2012, he said, was the result of Southwest Airlines buying AirTran to gain access to its routes to the Caribbean, and then closing AirTran routes many destinations. "They pulled out of 22 airports, and ours just happened to be one of the hardest hit," **Giardino** said. "It's no one here's fault that it happened. The good news is that we have the capacity for more, and we have a demand for more - and we'll get it. Airlines that were in a contraction mode from 2008 until about 2014 are now in an expansion mode. That's the good news. So we are poised and ready." On April 6, Elite Airways is launching new service out of Newport News to Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Mondays and Fridays. But the airport is hoping to get more routes on Elite, to other destinations, he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://oysterpointer.net/michael-giardino-a-passion-for-flying-and-finding-solutions/>
December 14, 2017

Michael Giardino: A passion for flying and finding solutions

Author: Cathy Welch

As executive director of Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport (PHF), Rochester, New York, native **Michael A. Giardino** and wife Janice are rediscovering life in Hampton Roads. “In 1966, I was sitting at the airport in the lap of my dad, who was taking flying lessons,” he says of his early love of aviation.

Giardino earned his Bachelor of Science degree in meteorology, planning to work for the National Weather Service. Instead, he entered the U. S. Navy and flew an H46 helicopter with night vision goggles out of Fort Eustis’ Felker Army Airfield and other Virginia Peninsula civilian fields. During his 26-year career, **Giardino** earned a Master of Arts degree in national security and strategic studies at the U.S. Naval War College and completed U.S. Naval Post Graduate School. He held leadership positions in Ramstein, Germany; Kabul and Kandahar, Afghanistan; and at the Pentagon.

Giardino holds the distinction of being a Mishap-free Naval Aviator, was an instrument check pilot and Night Vision Device (NVC) Instructor Pilot with more than 2,540 flight hours. He was a squadron maintenance officer, responsible for 14 aircraft and 250 personnel leading seagoing units, flying dangerous missions in harsh environments. He was also a nuclear weapons safety officer. And he was awarded two defense Meritorious Service Medals for service in Afghanistan, the Air Medal and the Humanitarian Medal as well as earning the Secretary of the Navy’s Safety Award.

Giardino met his wife at their 10-year high school reunion. She embraced Navy life, was president of the spouse’s club and ran many charitable events. When their family moved back to Rochester after separating from the Navy, Janice was able to spend a lot of time with her mom before she died.

Son Kyle, 28, was in the U.S. Marine Corps Infantry for four years and lives in Key West. “We both have been to Afghanistan, but Kyle was infantry and I was a staff officer,” **Giardino** says. Son Dominic, 23, is in the Netherlands at The Royal Conservatory of The Hague on a Fulbright scholarship. He plays late 1700s-style clarinet.

In 1999’s hurricane Floyd, **Giardino** made 110 helicopter rescues in the Tar River Valley in North Carolina. “It was the best flying I ever did,” he says.

While in Hampton Roads with the Navy, **Giardino** was assigned to Norfolk Naval Air Station. He served on the USS Eisenhower, USS Saipan, USS Nassau, USS Savannah and worked as Military Sealift Command with the JFK Battle Group. **Giardino**’s last assignment in the Navy was as executive officer for Naval Air Station Key West. Before assuming the position of

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

executive director of Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport in early November, **Giardino** was director of aviation with the Monroe County Airport Authority for the Greater Rochester International Airport. “Working for the Peninsula Airport Commission allows me to continue my career and passion for working around airplanes,” **Giardino** says of his current position. “One of the things I bring to this job is that I’ve visited a lot of places.”

In his travels he takes photos with his phone of restrooms, shelving, exits, advertising and parking lots to name a few, for the purpose of bringing positive things to his own airport. “Whenever you travel, you always bring something back,” says Jessica Wharton, director of air service, marketing and public relations who does the same thing.

Patrick Henry Field (PHF) employs 90 workers, offering service on American Airlines to Charlotte and Philadelphia, and Delta Air Lines to Atlanta, both providing connections worldwide. The airport offers onsite shuttle service, free baggage carts and Wi-Fi. The airport recently expanded to consolidate two security checkpoints into one, improving TSA efficiency. It also added the new Take PHFlight restaurant and bar, a video wall and ample seating with charging stations.

Giardino enjoys playing and watching all sports. His favorite football team is the Buffalo Bills, and the Buffalo Sabres is his hockey team. He and Janice take walks and garden. After three years in Ramstein, the **Giardinios** enjoy traveling Europe. They’ve cruised the Baltic, the Mediterranean, the Nile and Scandinavia.

“The airport commission is excited to have Mr. **Giardino** lead, manage and develop our airport for future success,” says George Wallace, Peninsula Airport Commission chairman. “We are confident [he] will assist the commission to exceed expectations of the State Aviation Board and our regional communities.”

“Challenges and solving problems give me the greatest satisfaction in my work life,” **Giardino** says. “No matter how big or small a challenge is, from flight diversions to small facility issues, finding solutions is my passion.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA)
November 20, 2017

New Peninsula airport director says restoring public trust is top priority

Author/Byline: Briana Adhikusuma

Michael Giardino is already creating a list of initiatives and goals for his first few years as the new executive director of the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport. And public trust is at the top of it. “The goals – how about restore the public trust? I had walked into a similar circumstance in Rochester, by the way. The previous two directors had not done too well,” he said. “The obvious thing for airports is to be a safe, secure and financially-stable facility. Airports are economic development musts; they’re economic development drivers. So, having a commercial service airport in your locality is a plus for businesses to sustain them, to grow them, to expand them.”

The Rochester, New York, native took over the airport’s leadership Nov. 6 and was most recently the director of aviation with the Monroe County Airport Authority for the Greater Rochester International Airport since 2012. “I had a great gig. I left a great gig. But I think Rochester was home or had been my hometown, but it no longer felt like home,” **Giardino** said. “And getting back to Virginia was – I don’t want to say a godsend – but the idea of getting back to Virginia and this part of Virginia. ... was a goal, I would say. So it all just kind of fit.”

Giardino first found a love for planes when his father, an Air Force veteran, was taking private pilot lessons in 1966. He was just a young boy at the time and his father sat him on his lap in the plane’s cockpit. He instantly “caught the bug” for flying. From that first moment in the cockpit, **Giardino** went on to serve as a Naval aviator for 26 years and resided in Southeast Virginia for 10 years. His last command was as the executive officer for Naval Air Station Key West. “It’s (flying) just a passion. I love aviation. I absolutely love to fly,” **Giardino** said. “I miss it terribly. But that’s OK. I get to be around them (planes) here and I get to help other people fly.”

While serving in Monroe County, he managed a staff of 120. In his new position, **Giardino** will be supervising 93 employees and an annual operating budget of around \$8 million. The past nine months have been rocky for the Peninsula airport since its previous director, Ken Spirito, was fired in May. Spirito was first placed on leave in early March after an audit conducted by the Virginia Department of Transportation found he had used airport funds for personal expenses. Sandy Wanner served as the airport’s interim director until Oct. 31.

As the new director, **Giardino** has been left with several issues – one of which is financial fallout over a \$5 million loan to startup airline People Express Airlines in 2014. The airline defaulted in 2015 and the Peninsula Airport Commission paid \$4.5 million to TowneBank, which issued the loan. But **Giardino** said he’s committed to regaining public trust and moving the airport in a positive direction. “It’s up to me to prove that – to restore the public trust. I hope they’ll give me the chance to prove that,” he said. “I think they have and will, but I guess we’ll see over time, won’t we?” **Giardino** also wants to increase the amount of air service at the

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

airport, including bringing in new airlines and establishing new routes. “Air service is huge on my agenda because that’s what I’m supposed to be here for – to grow the air service development,” he said. The airport currently has two airlines, Delta and American Airlines, that fly to three destinations: Atlanta, Charlotte and Philadelphia. “With those (federal) grants that we receive comes certain obligations and it should be used in the way it is intended to be used,” **Giardino** said. “And we will make sure that we live up to that fiduciary responsibility.”

Giardino graduated from the State University of New York at Brockport with a degree in meteorology in 1985 and was commissioned as an officer in the Navy in December the same year. He also studied information technology at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and graduated from the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, with a master’s in national security and strategic studies in 2001. Among his highest military decorations, **Giardino** received two Defense Meritorious Service Medals for his service in Afghanistan and the Air Medal and Humanitarian Service Medal for 110 rescues after Hurricane Floyd.

Giardino’s starting annual salary is \$165,000 with a \$600 per month car allowance, according to his contract. “This facility is a great facility,” **Giardino** said. “I am very proud to be the executive director here. “We’re just going to get back to where we were and even better.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael A. Giardino** is listed below.]

Daily Messenger (Canandaigua, NY)

October 14, 2017

IN BRIEF

ROCHESTER

Airport director leaving for Virginia

Author: Unknown

Greater Rochester International Airport Director **Michael A. Giardino** is leaving to serve as the executive director of an airport in Virginia. **Giardino**, who will be the new executive director of the Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport in Newport News, has been the director in Rochester since 2012.

In a statement, Monroe County Executive Cheryl Dinolfo thanked **Giardino** for his service, applauding his work on the airport's new renovation project. She also named Airport Deputy Director Andy Moore as the new Interim Airport Director, effective Oct.30.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Victor Post (NY)

August 18, 2017

Victor-Farmington Rotary discuss aviation programs

Author: Messenger Post Media

Victor-Farmington Rotary Club's first meeting in August featured an extended two-part program involving operations at Rochester International Airport and Honor Flight Rochester. **Michael Giardino**, director of aviation operations, discussed the current renovation project underway at the airport. **Giardino** had a 26-year career in the U.S. Navy as a naval aviation officer. In his last assignment, he was the executive officer at the Naval Air Station in Key West, Florida. Joining him during the presentation was Jennifer Hanrahan, director for marketing and public relations. The airport recently received a \$40 million grant under the state's Upstate Airport Economic Revitalization Competition Program. The \$40 million will help fund the cost of the renovation program estimated at \$54 million. To qualify for the money, the project must be completed by the fall 2018. Rochester International Airport is a small hub airport that houses operations for seven commercial air transportation companies. It serves as a component of the air transportation network connecting western New York to other parts of the country and the world.

The improvements will include improved landscaping, lighting, wayfinding signs and a new Smart Phone Lot with better user accessibility. The new lot will be located before travelers approach the airport terminal, and will eliminate unnecessary driving on circular airport roads. A large LED display will be installed with flight information. Other improvements include an improved security screening process, improved passenger lounge seating, more access for charging electronic devices and improved food vending capabilities. Renovation plans include a new canopy to provide protection from inclement weather to passengers traveling between the parking garage and the terminal. In the second segment of the meeting, Richard Stewart, president of Honor Flight Rochester; and Larry Strassner, events director; spoke to Victor-Farmington Rotary about the program's history.

Honor Flight started in 2005 in Springfield, Ohio, to honor American veterans for their service to the country. Six small planes departed from Springfield to Washington, D.C., with 12 World War II veterans to see the memorial to their sacrifices. The program has expanded to 132 regional programs. The Rochester program was established in 2008. It is an all-volunteer organization that depends on public support to sustain its program. The program has expanded to include veterans of the Korean War, and will eventually include Vietnam-era veterans.

Since its inception, the Rochester program has honored 2,588 veterans with flights to Washington, D.C. They travel Saturdays and return Sundays. The Rochester program is one of nine programs in the state; it is the only one that includes an overnight stay in Washington, D.C. As part of their experience, the vets visit memorials to their service, including Arlington National Cemetery and the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Associated Press State Wire: New York (NY)

December 30, 2016

Threats, abandoned bags prompts closure of Rochester airport

Author/Byline: Unknown

The Greater Rochester International Airport was briefly shut down after bomb threats were received and two unattended bags prompted law enforcement to respond. Roads leading into and out of the western New York airport were closed for two hours Thursday after "specific threats" were made and the bags were discovered.

Monroe County sheriffs deployed dogs to search the airport while robots inspected the suspicious bags.

Sheriff Patrick O'Flynn says roads were reopened and activity resumed at the airport shortly before 4 p.m. after the bags were determined to be safe. The belongings turned out to be abandoned luggage.

Airport director **Michael Giardino** says the airport remained open for flights throughout the investigation and there were minimal delays.

O'Flynn declined to provide specifics regarding the nature of the bomb threats.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Rochester Business Journal (NY)
September 21, 2016

Airport gets \$40 million grant for improvements

Author: Velvet Spicer

Greater Rochester International Airport has received a \$40 million grant from the state for revitalization. Gov. Andrew Cuomo was in town Wednesday to announce that Rochester had won the full amount it applied for as part of the Upstate Airport Economic Development and Revitalization Competition, announced in June.

The \$200 million program allowed 74 eligible upstate airports to apply for grants of up to \$40 million each. Sixteen airports applied for funding. Cuomo also was slated to visit Elmira/Corning Regional Airport to announce funding there.

Rochester's proposal was put together by a team of individuals from the airport and local engineering and architectural firms, including airport director of aviation **Michael Giardino**. Rochester's full proposal requires \$63 million in funding, with \$23 million coming from airport and county sources.

In his announcement Wednesday, Cuomo noted that for many years Upstate New York was in decline. "There was a negative synergy. We were losing businesses," Cuomo said, noting that the economy has become more positive. Cuomo said that in today's economy, the single most important asset is the airport, because it is the front door of the city. "It's about the airport and the amenities," Cuomo said. "People expect the level of amenities they have in other airports."

Rochester's airport transformation will include a number of new technologies, as well as safety and security features. The plan calls for accessibility features with a particular focus on the deaf and hearing impaired community. Lighting and color will play a role in the airport's makeover.

The proposal calls for a curvature of the terminal and more windows for better visuals throughout the concourse. **Giardino** and his team also plan to build a canopy over the roadway between the parking garage and the terminal and move the cell phone lot so that it can be accessed prior to arriving at the terminal. "You have proposed a \$63 million transformation plan that is going to take the airport from an airport of yesterday to an airport of tomorrow," Cuomo said during the announcement. "That is going to make your front door a state-of-the-art front door where you have as great a welcome area to attract new business and new people as any city in this country."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2016/01/27/clock-nations-never-took-off-airport/79421046/>

January 27, 2016

Clock of Nations never took off from airport

It was supposed to have gone to Golisano Children's Hospital, but things changed.

Author: Marcia Greenwood

In 2008, as Midtown Plaza prepared to close, its centerpiece for nearly 50 years — the Clock of Nations — was relocated (after being cleaned, painted and repaired) to the Greater Rochester International Airport.

An icon of childhood for many here, "our fabled timepiece" only was supposed to stay at the airport until 2012 and then move to its permanent home: Golisano Children's Hospital. But as early as 2009, hospital officials began questioning whether the clock — whose 12 displays open on the hour to reveal mechanized, internationally themed dioramas — would fit in with expansion plans. And on Wednesday, a hospital spokesman said the facility decided a while ago not to take it.

So it remains at the airport, beyond security checkpoints, where it can be seen only by ticketed passengers. Despite the fact that the airport was obligated to host the clock for just three years, airport director **Mike Giardino** says there are no plans to move it elsewhere: "It's an artifact and near and dear to a lot of people, including myself," he said. "I grew up in Rochester. It's a treasure. We're not walking away from our responsibility to care for the clock and display the clock."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Rochester Business Journal (NY)
November 13, 2015

Taking the airport to new heights

Author: Velvet Spicer

Navy veteran **Michael Giardino** is director of the Greater Rochester International Airport. (Photo by Kimberly McKinzie) As a child, **Michael Giardino** spent a lot of time at Greater Rochester International Airport watching his father take flying lessons, unaware that decades later he would have an office on the second floor of the facility.

Although his love of all things flight-related started at a young age, it was in 1985 that **Giardino** walked away from graduate school and into a U.S. Navy recruiting office. It was an about-face that would have a resounding effect on his career, personal life and who he would become as a person and business leader. "A friend of mine said he was going to join the Navy and be a pilot and I said, 'You're a knucklehead. If you can do it, I can do it,'" **Giardino**, 53, recalls. "And I went to a recruiter the following Monday."

Three decades later, **Giardino** serves as director of aviation for the airport. He earned his wings and spent 26 years piloting helicopters for the Navy. "I went from a long-haired college student to an ensign in the U.S. Navy," **Giardino** recalls. "And I loved it." At the airport **Giardino** oversees 100 staff and operations of the facility, which serves nearly 2.4 million passengers annually. The airport has an annual budget of \$32 million and handles roughly 150 flights daily from its 22 passenger gates.

Giardino works closely with the seven commercial airlines serving passengers from here: American Airlines Inc., United Airlines Inc., Delta Air Lines Inc., JetBlue Airways Corp., Southwest Airlines Co., Allegiant Air and Air Canada. He also works with the Federal Aviation Administration and the Transportation Security Administration.

The Monroe County Airport Authority's mission is to ensure the airport provides safe, efficient and economical air transportation and it promotes economic development, trade and tourism throughout the region. **Giardino's** job is a lot like running a small community, he says. His years in the Navy prepared him for that.

Working at early age

Giardino's first foray into the working world was alongside his father, who owned two local dairies in Gates and Brockport. He grew up on a milk truck, delivering to local grocers and schools. After his father died in a car accident in 1973, his older brother started a general contracting business here and **Giardino** labored for him. "These experiences taught me a lot about hard work and small business," **Giardino** says. "Small- business owners have to be very good at their core business, but they also have to make sure all the administrative stuff gets done." **Giardino** comes from a family of entrepreneurs, including hairdressers, barbers and grocery store owners. From them he learned that working hard was to be admired and long hours

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

were OK. "Quality of work speaks for itself, and your customers will come back if the quality is good," he says. After high school **Giardino** pursued a political science degree at the University of Rochester. While there, he saw an ad for a local rock band. As lead singer of Iron Angel, **Giardino** and his bandmates won the Monroe County Fair Battle of the Bands, which included a gig at the former Red Creek in Henrietta and three hours of recording studio time. "The type of music that we played, which was hard rock/heavy metal, we came to the conclusion with the owners of Red Creek that we were never going to play at Red Creek and we walked away from that," he recalls with a laugh. "But the three hours of recording time we used."

While he was working a late-night shift at a 7-Eleven store he heard Iron Angel being played on the radio. "That was very cool," he says, noting that he remains in touch with his former bandmates. **Giardino** knew that being a musician was not something he wanted to do with the rest of his life, and he also realized political science and becoming a lawyer were not going to work for him. He transferred to SUNY College at Brockport, where he earned a degree in meteorology. Upon graduation he went to SUNY Albany, where he planned to get a master's degree in atmospheric sciences.

Career path

Instead, he joined the Navy. While in the Navy **Giardino** flew H-46 and H-60 helicopters. Primarily stationed on the East Coast, **Giardino** also attended the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., in the early 1990s and from 1996 to 1997 was a flight instructor in San Diego.

In 1999 **Giardino** had an opportunity to come full circle: He flew the CH-46D Sea Knight helicopter from Norfolk, Va., to the Rochester International Air Show, where he served as a static display participant for the event. "It was great to bring a little bit of my Navy life back home to Rochester," he says. "Friends and family got to see what I did for the Navy, and my Navy buddies got to see where I came from. Who knew I'd retire years later and end up here?"

In 2001 **Giardino** graduated from the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., and then went to work at the Pentagon. He was at the Pentagon on 9/11, as well as during the anthrax scares and the Beltway sniper attacks in 2002. "I enjoyed my time in the Pentagon," he says. "I learned a lot and I worked with some great people." **Giardino** spent three years in Germany; while there, he was deployed to Afghanistan as chief of air operations for NATO. He spent time in Kabul in 2005 and in 2006 served as the lead U.S. planner in Kandahar as the U.S. was transitioning the base to a NATO base.

While in Kandahar, **Giardino** began thinking about what he would do when he retired from the Navy. At the base he learned how to run a community—from power, water and sewage systems to how to house people, feed them and do laundry. When he returned to Ramstein, Germany, **Giardino** negotiated orders to be the executive officer at Naval Air Station Key West. His four years as second-in-command in Florida further prepared him for his job at GRIA, he says. **Giardino** oversaw an airfield, two marinas, a port facility for large Navy ships, base housing for more than 300 units and recreational facilities for families, among other things. "It was like being the city manager of a small city," **Giardino** says. "That's when I said I think municipal

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

government is what I want to do." When he retired in 2011, **Giardino** began looking for municipal opportunities. "I put out about 100 cover letters and resumes, and the Village of Brockport answered my call," he says. **Giardino** served as manager/treasurer in Brockport until taking the job at the airport in 2012. "I would say overall the military experience rounded me out tremendously. And it also allowed me to explore things I never thought I'd explore," he says. "So it really did give me an education and it worked for me. I know it doesn't work for everybody. But the military did wonders for me."

Coming to county

When **Giardino** joined the airport it was on the heels of former director Susan Walsh's resignation, following a charge of driving while intoxicated. Walsh had replaced David Damelio, who had resigned in January 2011 following reports of misspending county money.

Since joining the organization, **Giardino** says non-airline revenue is up, while expenditures are down. A few years ago total budget for the airport was \$34 million. In three years the airport has saved the airlines more than \$4 million, **Giardino** notes. "We try to keep their cost per (passenger boarding) down so they make more money per passenger and, hopefully, add more flights," he explains. "It's one of the reasons why, in a contraction environment, we were able to retain flights and recently add Allegiant."

Airport revenue comes from an array of sources, **Giardino** says, including non-aeronautical areas such as parking, car rental concessions, land rent and other items. Parking contributes \$6.5 million annually to the airport's budget, while car rental and other concessions add up to some \$5 million. Aeronautical revenues contribute roughly \$16 million to GRIA's budget. Landing fees add some \$7.5 million, while terminal fees, which include the ticket counter and gates, add up to another \$5.5 million.

The airport receives \$4.5 million per year in FAA entitlement grants for airfield upgrades and improvements, based on commercial airline activity. The airport is not funded through tax dollars, **Giardino** says. The airport recently signed three-year lease agreements with some of its airline partners, including Southwest and JetBlue, and has received commitments from others, which means the airlines will continue to operate out of the Rochester airport. A 2011 study by the state Department of Transportation shows the local airport is responsible for creating and sustaining 10,000 jobs, directly and indirectly, while contributing \$800 million to the local economy each year.

The airport, which was built in 1927, has 58 outbound flights and 58 inbound flights daily. That likely will not increase without effort from the community, in particular the business community, **Giardino** says. "Business travel is most of who travels here. And airlines look at business travel because they pay more money per seat," he says. "It's very important that the business community use their airport because if you don't, you'll lose service."

If there are fewer than 100 people on a flight, the region runs the risk of losing that flight. And the only flights out of Rochester consistently running with that many passengers are flights to

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Florida, which typically are leisure flights, **Giardino** says. Southwest recently pulled two flights out of Rochester to the Midwest that were underperforming, and replaced them with one flight to the Baltimore/Washington area, where they have better connectivity and fewer delays. "We must use the service that we get or we're going to lose it. If you like your airport, use your airport, keep your airport," **Giardino** says. "There are a lot of things we can do at the airport, like keep costs low and be a strong advocate for the community, but the community also has to do their part."

A couple of decades ago airfare out of Rochester was one of the highest in the nation, **Giardino** acknowledges, so many people got into the habit of driving to Buffalo for flights. In recent years, however, Rochester flights have been below the national average. "We stress what we offer: We're convenient, we're just around the corner and we're affordable. Our parking rates are the lowest in the state," he says. **Giardino** says the biggest challenges he sees in his job are airline consolidations and the reduction in the frequency of flights.

In addition, adds airport operations manager Timothy Woolston, the changing regulatory environment can be challenging. "Are we meeting those expectations that they have for us and staying current with industry changes? The changes over the last 25 years have been astronomical and trying to keep up with that is a challenge," Woolston says. But it is a fun challenge, he acknowledges.

Airport fire chief Todd Bane has been with the organization 34 years and says the face of aviation has changed dramatically in the last three decades. FAA regulations can be challenging, but security also is an issue, he says. "Security is a major challenge for the airport," Bane says. "There are always people looking to do bad things. They look at aviation as a prime target, so we always have to be ready."

Despite the challenges, the working atmosphere is somewhat relaxed, and employees describe the environment as family-like. "I think it's an enjoyable atmosphere. We try to create an atmosphere where people want to come to work," Woolston says. "It's non-adversarial. We try to keep it light." Adds Bane: "It's a great place to work. Most everybody knows everybody else. It's a great team here at the airport."

Teamwork is a must, **Giardino** says. "It's absolutely collaborative. I always point to the binders on the credenza," he says, pointing to several thick manuals. "We have rule books. But it's the team that makes that work." **Giardino's** management style reflects his beliefs in teamwork. He is hands-on when necessary, but he also walks around a lot, observing. **Giardino** does not micromanage, Bane says, but you can tell he has a military background. "He will tell you what to do. There's an assignment and he expects you to complete it," Bane adds. "He allows you to get your work done in the way that you see fit."

Giardino is a "chain-of-command" type of manager, Woolston adds. "He allows his subordinates to do their jobs and he guides them when they need guidance," Woolston says. "When we have questions or are looking for direction we can go to **Mike**. But he really puts it

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino**

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

back to us as department heads to manage our departments within the confines of the regulations." What makes the airport successful, Bane says, is having the right person leading it. "This guy came to us understanding what it takes to run an airport. An airport is like a small city or town," Bane says. "We have a person that's leading the airport now that gets it." The best part of his job is the people, **Giardino** says. "This has got to be one of the best staffs I've ever worked with in my entire life, and I've worked with some great people," he says.

Giardino says his passion and integrity are his strengths, and he learned patience from his first flight instructor, Capt. Billy Young, whose call sign was Stump. "I had never flown before. We got in the air and I looked around. And I kept looking around," he recalls with a laugh. "Because for the first time in my life I was flying above treetops with this bubble canopy and I'm not in an aircraft where you're just peeking out a window. And he's just screaming over the intercom, put the gear up, get the flaps up, all the things I was supposed to do real fast. He had to be the most patient man." The advice he would give other business leaders is knowing the importance of patience. "Doing it right the first time is fast enough," he says. "You don't get many second chances in the aviation business."

At home

Giardino was born in Rochester and raised in Charlotte. He lives there with his wife, Janice. He has two sons, Kyle, 26, and Dominic, 21. Another son, Mitchell, died when he was 8 months old of a rare, congenital disorder. His favorite family memories are the births of all of his children and his wedding, he says. His musical gene was passed on and one of his sons is a student at the Eastman School of Music.

Long-time friend Gregory May says family is important to **Giardino**, as is the church and his work with Veterans Outreach Center Inc. "When he was in the military he was always doing charity for veterans," May says. "It's very important to him to be part of the community." **Giardino** also is involved with the Rochester Rotary Club, which runs the Sunshine Campus in Rush, a fully accessible residential summer camp that helps children with paralysis and other physical challenges and their families. May calls his friend "dynamic." "I think that he is very intense on everything he does. He's always been that way," May says. "Whatever he was doing at the moment was the greatest thing in the world. Whether that's being a friend, or studying meteorology in college or flying helicopters, that was always the greatest thing in the world." While **Giardino** is humble, he has a few accomplishments he particularly is proud of.

In 1999 Hurricane Floyd hit the East Coast with a vengeance. When it struck North Carolina it caused billions of dollars in damage and widespread flooding where Hurricane Dennis had hit just weeks earlier. **Giardino** was part of the rescue efforts that saved hundreds of lives. "I got 110 rescues after Hurricane Floyd. That was pretty satisfying," he says. "Pulling people off of rooftops. That was probably the best day of flying ever." And though he is proud to have earned his Navy wings, one thing takes precedence. "Husband and father are No. 1," **Giardino** says. "Family is No. 1, all the time,"

Michael Giardino

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Times Herald-Record, The (Middletown, NY)

April 26, 2015

Tax relief could boost Stewart

Author: Judy Rife

After a decade of lobbying the state Legislature, the general aviation industry has finally secured the tax relief that it believes will restore New York's competitiveness – and bring lost jobs back to its airports. "What this legislation does is level the playing field with Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey – the states that have cannibalized our business," said **Mike Giardino**, president of the New York Aviation Management Association and director of aviation at Greater Rochester International Airport.

The bill that Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed April 13 eliminates state sales and use taxes on the purchase of general aviation aircraft – planes used for non-commercial purposes - and any machinery or equipment installed on them as of Sept. 1. State sales taxes on their maintenance and repair was eliminated in 2004.

Previously, only commercial aircraft – planes used for passengers, cargo and charters – were exempt from these taxes. "This is going to make a measurable difference in New York, where we are so highly taxed, so highly regulated," said Maureen Halahan, president and CEO of the Orange County Partnership. "People are doing happy dances about it."

Halahan said she expects the tax relief will bring new tenants to Stewart International Airport and encourage current ones to expand. The airport is already home to Cessna's Citation Service Center, GE's corporate fleet and two fixed-base operators, Atlantic Aviation and Airborne Aviation, that supply the gamut of support services to plane owners, from hangars to repairs to fuel. "Over the next year or two, Stewart will grab some of the low-hanging fruit - planes that aren't location-sensitive," from Teterboro Airport in New Jersey and Waterbury-Oxford Airport in Connecticut, said Fritz Kass, the Stewart representative to the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. "But they'll have to build more hangars first, so this will mean construction jobs, too."

Tenants at Teterboro, in particular, will be attracted to Stewart's wide-open spaces and lower operating costs and to the county's lower cost of living, predicted Kass, explaining that corporate planes bring their crews with them. Teterboro, a purely general aviation airport, has been at capacity for years. Like Stewart, it is operated by the Port Authority.

Giardino said the state has lost more than 700 general aviation aircraft over the past decade, most of them to low-tax or no-tax neighbors who promoted themselves as cheaper places to buy and base planes, yet still close enough to serve the New York market. Prices of single-engine planes can range from \$16,000 to \$300,000, and of twin-engine jets, from \$645,000 to \$65 million. But the loss of a business jet, according to a state Department of Transportation study, also translates into the loss of an average of five on-airport jobs and \$1 million a year in

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

economic activity. “Everybody uses the word ‘jobs,’ but we like to use the word ‘careers,’ because jobs such as pilots and mechanics really are career paths,” said **Giardino**. Mechanics, for example, have to be Federal Aviation Administration-certified before they can touch a plane, and then they earn between \$58,000 and \$95,000 a year. “Stewart has 5,000 full- and part-time jobs, maybe 2,000 of them at the Air National Guard, all good jobs, and it can support more,” said Kass. “People don’t see what a huge economic thing it is, because it doesn’t have a lot of air service, but that’s also going to change in a few years.” The legislation, despite its parallels to the state’s other tax-relief programs for businesses, languished for years, in part because some lawmakers perceived it as pandering to rich people rather than promoting economic development.

In what **Giardino** called “a beta test,” NYAMA finally convinced them to waive state sales taxes on maintenance and repair of general aviation aircraft for five years in 2004. The tax relief stopped enough planes from leaving the state for pricey tune-ups to produce a 64 percent increase in local and state sales tax revenues from aviation maintenance and repair-related businesses by its third year. The increase, documented by the state Department of Taxation and Finance, resulted in the exemption becoming permanent.

The FAA subsequently reported an increase of 23 maintenance and repair businesses and 686 new aviation-related jobs in New York. “We are highly confident this tax relief will quickly become revenue neutral, and then revenue positive, too,” said **Giardino**. “The results will be tangible. The end game will show the payoff is there.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Democrat and Chronicle

October 6, 2014

Giardino to lead statewide aviation group

Michael Giardino, director of aviation at the Greater Rochester International Airport, has been elected president of the New York Aviation Management Association. The organization represents more than 75 members in the aviation field. **Giardino** previously served as the group's vice president.

In a news release, **Giardino** said the group would continue to urge state leaders to pass the Aviation Jobs Act, a bill that would exempt general aviation aircraft purchased in New York from sales and use tax. "We will lead and advocate for our members with respect to understanding current aviation issues such as funding of contract towers, commercial airline pilot shortages, and the impact of unmanned systems," **Giardino** said. Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks appointed **Giardino** in 2012.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Rochester Business Journal (NY)
December 28, 2012

Delta Air Lines soars to the top in local market

Author: Thomas Adams

Delta Air Lines Inc. is the new heavyweight at the Greater Rochester International Airport, having surpassed longtime leader US Airways Group Inc. for the last three years and added a \$160 million New York City hub that benefits local travelers. In addition, Delta two weeks ago announced a \$360 million investment in London-based Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd. to provide nine flights daily to England from the New York City area. International passenger traffic at the Rochester airport was up 14.3 percent from 2003 to 2011, according to a Brookings Institution study released in October. GRIA ranked 57th among 90 metropolitan airports in the nation with 174,527 international passengers in 2011. It was 59th in 2003 with 152,691 passengers.

Latin American and Caribbean destinations accounted for 35.9 percent of Rochester's international traffic in 2011, with Western Europe next at 33.1 percent, the study found. More than half of Rochester's international travelers used the New York City area as a connecting point last year, with 52 percent transferring in New York City, northern New Jersey or Long Island, Brookings found. Metropolitan Chicago ranked second for local global travelers at 24 percent, the study found. Metro Atlanta was third at 22 percent.

This year

Delta carried 26.7 percent of passenger traffic at the Rochester airport during the first 10 months of 2012, data compiled by GRIA shows. United Airlines Inc. was second at 21.7 percent as of Oct. 31. United's total includes flights by Continental Airlines Inc., whose acquisition by parent UAL Inc. was completed in March. AirTran Airways ranked third at 17.8 percent; US Airways fourth at 17.4 percent; JetBlue Airways Corp. fifth at 11.1 percent; American Eagle Airlines Inc. sixth at 4.9 percent; and Air Canada seventh at 0.4 percent. Delta led in Rochester traffic in 2011 with nearly 1.21 million passengers, or 24.2 percent of the airport's total enplanements. The Atlanta-based airline also was first in 2010 with nearly 1.27 million passengers, or 22.8 percent. US Airways had been first in Rochester in the eight preceding years, though its dominance steadily waned from enplanements of nearly 1.2 million, or 32.3 percent of total traffic, in 2002. Delta seems poised to remain No. 1 here, with two hefty investments in the last 12 months.

In September 2011, the airline announced plans to establish a hub at New York's LaGuardia Airport, announcing 100 new flights and 29 new destinations last December. The itinerary included four direct flights daily from Rochester, which commenced last March. Delta also expanded service in Buffalo and Syracuse. "We've always had a significant presence in Rochester," said Gail Grimmett, Delta's senior vice president for New York. "We serve Rochester from Detroit, Minneapolis, Atlanta and from some of our other hubs. "The Upstate New York markets are important to the Delta system. Now we're able to serve it from LaGuardia as well, but there is significant business in Upstate New York." The \$160 million LaGuardia hub was conceived following an agreement between Delta and US Airways in which Delta acquired

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

132 LaGuardia slot pairs in exchange for US Airways' acquisition of 42 slots at Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. That deal was reached in August 2009. A slot essentially reserves space for one round-trip flight. Slot controls are in effect at LaGuardia, John F. Kennedy International Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport in the New York City area and at Reagan National. They are designed to help the Federal Aviation Administration manage congestion by limiting flight departures and arrivals each hour. "The challenge with New York City overall, and growing in New York, is that slot control is very constrained in terms of how you can grow," Grimmert said. "If you want to be a preferred carrier-particularly out of LaGuardia, which is the businessman's airport of choice-you really want to serve all of your top business destinations. "The preferred carrier should be No. 1 or No. 2 on those top 50 business markets. For us at the time, before we expanded, it's hard to be No. 1 or No. 2 when you don't serve the top 50 business destinations."

Switch to jets

As part of Delta's \$100 million terminal expansion at LaGuardia and the implementation of non-stop flights to upstate cities, it replaced US Airways' turboprop aircraft with 70-seat Canadair Regional Jets. "We don't have any propeller planes, so it wasn't a choice of swapping out one for one," Grimmert said. "That left us to decide whether the 50- or 70-seat regional jet was the right aircraft for the market. "In Rochester, because of the demographics of the people who fly us and the demand we knew we had, we knew the 70-seaters would do very well in that market." The regional jets have wireless networking technology and the option of first-class seats. The larger planes allow Delta to provide 260 seats a day from Rochester to New York City, Grimmert said. "The hub of the state is important from an economic driver perspective," she said. "When you look at the evolution of what's happened in Syracuse, Buffalo and Rochester, the business development that's occurred in all three markets has been significant."

Delta announced a second big investment two weeks ago, a \$360 million stake in London-based Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd. to provide nine flights daily to England from the New York City area. New York City is a competitive market for airlines, Grimmert said, with at least 16 carriers servicing the metropolitan area. "There's over \$14 billion of revenue that the industry generates here in New York (City)," she said. "It is a huge market, and one that is critical to any carrier who wants to be a preferred carrier for both business and leisure traffic." New York City is now Delta's No. 2 hub, behind its home base in Atlanta. "The LaGuardia slot swap, in particular, really filled out our portfolio in New York," Grimmert said. "That has always been a great international connecting hub for us. We needed something to help bolster both our market presence and our capability to serve the market on the domestic front. "Part of that is selling travelers on the fact that they can get from Rochester to six continents very easily through the air service you have there."

Delta has doubled its service from New York City to upstate cities since 2009, representatives said, and has non-stop flights from Rochester to 270 cities. It has increased its total seats in Rochester by 28 percent this year and increased seats to New York City by 122 percent. "We knew where and how we wanted to expand and why the routes we wanted to serve were valuable to us," Grimmert said. "It's not just being a part of a specific city or area. It's being part of the

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

entire state." Delta schedules 17 flights daily from Rochester, 22 from Buffalo and 14 from Syracuse. Albany is not part of the LaGuardia hub. "We do serve Albany from our other hubs," Grimmert said. "There wasn't the demand for Albany and LaGuardia that we expected. There were people that wanted it, but I think it's easier to take the train or drive."

US Airways was the most popular airline in Rochester from 2002 to 2007 and finished barely ahead of AirTran in 2008 and 2009. US Airways and AMR Corp.-parent of cash-strapped American Airlines and its regional partner American Eagle-are negotiating a possible merger. Combined, the two airlines accounted for 22.3 percent of passenger traffic at GRIA through October. Business trips account for 55 percent of the Rochester traffic, with leisure traffic at 45 percent, said **Michael Giardino**, the Rochester airport's director of aviation.

Delta operates seven of GRIA's 11 daily non-stop flights to New York City, he said. "That's significant," he said. "Delta meets the demand of the business traveler. New York is our No. 1 destination. They have four flights to Atlanta, but Atlanta has traditionally been a strong market for Delta, obviously, as one of their hubs."

Kennedy International is the top destination for Rochester departures, **Giardino** said. Orlando International Airport in Florida is second, and Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport is third. LaGuardia is seventh. The agreement between Delta and Virgin Atlantic gives Delta the 49 percent stake held by Singapore Airlines Ltd. The Virgin Group Ltd., owned by Richard Branson, holds 51 percent of the shares. The new joint venture, expected to be implemented by the end of 2013, will produce 31 round-trip flights between North America and the United Kingdom, the airlines said. London's Heathrow Airport will accommodate 23 of the flights.

Terminal construction

At GRIA, meanwhile, work continues on a \$4 million terminal upgrade. "That's not huge when you're talking about airport dollars, but it's a big deal for Rochester," **Giardino** said. The project commenced during the summer and is scheduled for completion in the spring. It includes new ticket counters and a new facade on the upper west side of the building. "We're doing significant work," **Giardino** said. "Our airlines partnered with us to give us ideas for their ticket kiosks and, basically, what the front door looks like and how we present ourselves when customers walk through the door. "They've been very patient during the construction phase. People are coming through the door, and the first thing they face are walls of plywood or a floor that's torn up, or bare walls and hanging wires. It doesn't look great now, but I think the place is going to look great in the spring."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: We normally do not include articles from blogs, as they are opinion pieces. But since this article is question and answer based, we included it.]

<https://blog.suny.edu/1898/alumni-profile-meet-michael-giardino/>
June 13, 2012

Alumni Profile: Meet Michael Giardino

Author: Megan Wolszczak

Alumni Profiles Power of SUNY Wellness & Success

SUNY Brockport alum **Michael Giardino** was recently appointed director of aviation for Monroe County’s Greater Rochester International Airport. **Giardino**, a retired US Navy Commander, was excited to share with us some great stories and details about his SUNY education and the pathway it provided to his success.

How did your SUNY education help you prepare for your military experience?

First and foremost, I would not have qualified for a officer’s commission without a bachelor’s degree, so you could say that my SUNY degree meant everything to me as far as preparing me for the military. However, in practice, the study habits that I had to developed in college were instrumental to my success in office candidate school and flight school. I could name a few SUNY Brockport professors (but I won’t), who knew the right time to turn up the heat a little bit, and that paid off a great deal because the competition in flight school was pretty tough. When I studied meteorology at SUNY Brockport, I learned that knowing the physics, math, and chemistry of the atmosphere very well improved my ability to understand and forecast weather. But I also learned that the forces that determine our weather are fluid and extremely dynamic and being wrong was part of the business. We had a weather forecasting contest every semester at SUNY back in those days. Developing thick skin was part of that contest because one SUNY grad, who shall remain nameless (but now runs the weather office in Buffalo), would say things like, “you’re out of your mind” or “you’re crazy” when critiquing another students forecast. We had some good debates and it was a positive learning atmosphere always based on fact and science, but enough room for a little bit of ‘gut feel’. Whether in the Navy, other government enterprise or private business, to succeed, you have to be as well-informed as you can be, sometimes make decisions from your ‘gut’, learn from your mistakes, and move to the next problem (or weather forecast) when it’s all said and done.

What is a typical day at work like for you?

Lucky for me no two days are the same at the airport and in County Government. The airport is a dynamic environment and that suits me just fine. That said, I am a creature of habit and routine. I succeed and fail by my ability to manage my time and calendar. I firmly believe in having a plan. As a Naval Aviator and US Navy Officer I relied heavily on policies, procedures, manuals and instructions. Well crafted documents and checklists are extremely useful tools to ensure consistent and safe operations in any organization, not just on the bridge of a ship or in the cockpit of an aircraft. At the same time, leaders and managers have to have the skills and flexibility to change course and react to “life”. So to answer your question, I am just

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Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

as comfortable with a day of staff meetings and office visits as I am with leaking pipes, a business meeting out-of-town or unexpected snowstorms that slow down (and hopefully don't shut down) airport operations. I do try to get out in the airport terminal at least once a day as well as tour the grounds by foot or car once a day too.

What was your involvement with any clubs/student organizations on campus?

I was active socially within the Department and we had a chapter of the American Meteorological Society. Outside of that, I worked a job in Rochester and, sadly, I commuted from Rochester. If I had it to do over again, my living arrangements would have been on or near campus. I came to Brockport after two full semesters at the University of Rochester, so I missed out in that respect.

How does it feel to be one of the few Monroe County airport directors with aviation experience?

It certainly helps that I understand the aviation side of the operation, but aviation is not all we do. We have to run like a business. That means we have to generate revenue, not just airline revenue but non-airline revenue. Non-airline revenue keeps the costs low for us and thus reduces the amount we have to charge the airlines for operating here. For the airlines, lower operating costs means lower fares and more frequent flights and that's good for Monroe County and the surrounding region. Therefore, I am fully involved in marketing this place. Not just advertising but coming up with ideas for attracting businesses that may want to operate at or near the airport. We are in a perfect geographic location and we are THE transportation hub for a 9 county Region. The airport director must also be cognizant of security and law enforcement procedures, facilities management, environmental compliance, construction planning and execution, public relations and customer service. Having aviation experience helps and aviation is why we exist, but aviation is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to the overall operation.

What do you think you can bring to the Monroe County airport that your predecessors have failed to?

The former directors should be commended for their work. Since I left Rochester in 1985, the improvements to this airport are remarkable. The terminal project, service roads and parking area are the most obvious to the naked eye, but what the traveling public does not see are the tremendous improvements to the runways, taxiways, ramps and airfield lighting as well as many other safety upgrades on the entire property. The staff here are top-notch professionals and well-respected around the country for their expertise.

What advice do you have to share with SUNY students?

Work hard (now and in the future), have a passion for something, and then pursue it. Take a chance, manage the risk, and execute. Setbacks WILL come along. It's the response to the setback that is what is important. Having fun and working are not mutually exclusive.

We'd like to thank **Michael** for his time and help. His passion is obvious and we wish him the best of luck in his new job.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Westside News Inc

April 8, 2012

Brockport’s proposed budget calls for no change in tax levy for 2012-13

Author: Kristina Gabalski

The Village of Brockport’s 2012/2013 tentative budget calls for no change in the tax levy. Appropriations total \$4.7 million, down from \$5.17 million (projected) in the 2011/2012 budget. During what was his last regular village board meeting before he begins his new job as director of the Greater Rochester International Airport, Village Manager/ Treasurer **Michael Giardino** presented the budget to trustees. **Giardino** said areas with the greatest jumps in cost include health insurance -up 18 percent this year and expected to increase another 20 percent in January 2013. He noted that fuel and petroleum costs also continue to increase.

At the end of the current fiscal year, **Giardino** says he expects an unreserved fund balance of \$365,000. “Employee benefits make up a large portion of the budget,” **Giardino** said. The plan includes a three percent salary increase for both union and non-union full- time employees. The Police Department allocation is increased from \$1,155,715 to \$1,181,357 in the 2012/2013 tentative budget. Also included is \$15,000 for maintenance of the Smith Street Bridge and a \$150,000 unallocated appropriation (contingency), **Giardino** said.

The budget includes no capital improvements or funding for celebrations. A \$215,000 deficit in the tentative budget “will be mitigated through use of fund balance,” **Giardino** said. The water budget includes no rate increase, he said.

Mayor Connie Castaneda told the board following the presentation that the village’s revenue streams are limited. “The largest part of our budget is employee costs – 71.8 percent,” the mayor said, and added that the only way to cut appropriations is “by the cutting of staff and limiting benefits.” “We are making no long-term plan, the fund balance is decreasing annually,” she said. “We are still a village in fiscal distress.”

Trustee Scott Hunsinger questioned **Giardino** as to whether the use of \$215,000 from the fund balance was “fiscally responsible.” “It would be prudent to use no more than ten percent of the current fund balance,” **Giardino** responded. He noted the village will have about \$1.2 million in fund balance at the end of this fiscal year. During his report, Trustee Hunsinger said the budget is a “living document. Over the next couple of weeks I hope the issues we bring forward will be looked at non-politically.” A public hearing on the budget is set for 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 10 at the Middle School Auditorium.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

US Fed News (USA)

February 22, 2012

MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE BROOKS TAPS FORMER U.S. NAVY PILOT, OFFICER GIARDINO TO SERVE AS AIRPORT DIRECTOR

The Monroe County Executive issued the following press release: Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks announced the appointment of **Michael A. Giardino** to the position of Director of Aviation for Monroe County's Greater Rochester International Airport. **Giardino**, a retired United States Navy Commander, possesses over two decades of military experience in the fields of aviation program planning, emergency preparedness, and community relations, in addition to financial, facilities, and human resources management. **Giardino's** appointment follows an intensive national search process that yielded more than 100 applicants.

"With over twenty years of experience in aviation operations, financial management, and emergency preparedness, Commander **Michael Giardino** is both eminently qualified and tremendously prepared to serve Monroe County as Director of Aviation," said Brooks. "Commander **Giardino's** breadth of knowledge and expertise, accumulated over a decorated career of service in the U.S. Navy, certainly make him a tailor-made candidate to lead our airport. In light of his impeccable qualifications, I am proud to entrust **Michael Giardino** with the task of building upon the Greater Rochester International Airport's already strong reputation as one of the best mid-sized airports in the nation."

Prior to his retirement in 2011, **Giardino** served as the Executive Officer and Deputy Commander of Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, which supports operational and readiness requirements for the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, National Guard units, federal agencies, and allied forces. As the station's second-in-command, **Giardino** served as de-facto Chief Operating Officer and Chief of Staff, directing operations of the 7 annex, 6,300 acre facility which supports 39 tenants; houses 5,500 employees and family members; receives 20,000 visitors annually; controls nearly 100,000 general aviation/military flight operations per year; and operates on a \$55 million annual budget. The Air Station also has the exact same regulatory oversight (FAA, Homeland Security, OSHA) as civilian airports.

Before accepting his post to Naval Air Station Key West in 2007, **Giardino** served as Chief of Air Operations (Kabul) and Lead Planner (Kandahar) during two deployments over the course of three years, where he supervised all North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allied command air operations in Afghanistan. Prior to his dual deployments to Afghanistan, **Giardino** held a variety of high-ranking positions within the U.S. Navy leadership, including serving as a top research analyst at the Pentagon during the 9/11 terrorist attacks and accumulating 2,540 mishap-free flight hours over the course of 26 years.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to serve Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks, the Monroe County Airport Authority, and, most importantly, the citizens of our community as the next Director of Aviation for Monroe County," said **Giardino**. "The military provided me with

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the opportunity to develop 26 years of effective problem-solving experience in some of the most complex and demanding environments on earth. I hope to bring those experiences to my new role as Monroe County's Director of Aviation and look forward to expanding upon the airport's exceptional standing as our community's 'Gateway to the World' in the days to come."

"I would like to thank Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks for carrying-out an exhaustive and thorough search for a highly-qualified Airport Director - a process which yielded an outstanding candidate like Commander **Michael Giardino**," said Monroe County Airport Authority Chairman James G. Vazzana. "The Monroe County Airport Authority Board looks forward to working in partnership with Commander **Giardino** to continue the record of exceptional operational success and customer satisfaction that the airport has built over the past several years."

"**Michael Giardino** is the ideal candidate to serve as Director of Aviation for Monroe County," wrote Admiral James G. Stavridis, U.S. Navy; Commander of United States European Command in a letter of recommendation. "He has trained and worked in aviation for over 26 years, he has experience in running multi-million dollar enterprises both in and out of the military, he has worked at the highest levels of government both nationally and internationally, and he works well in a multitude of environments from the taxiway to the boardroom."

Giardino is a graduate of Charlotte High School in Rochester, NY. He has studied at the University of Rochester and Monroe Community College, and holds a BS in Meteorology from SUNY College at Brockport. Over the course of his service with the Navy, **Giardino** completed two graduate programs, including Information Systems Management at the Naval Postgraduate School and an MA program from the Naval War College in National Security and Strategic Studies. Upon returning to Monroe County in 2011, **Giardino** was appointed Village Manager/Treasurer for the Village of Brockport, a position he holds currently. **Giardino** is a resident of the City of Rochester's Charlotte neighborhood.

Giardino's appointment is subject to confirmation by the Monroe County Legislature and will be addressed in the March committee cycle and subsequently at the April meeting of the full Legislature. **Giardino** will also be subject to appointment as the Executive Director of the Monroe County Airport Authority at a future meeting of the Authority Board. **Giardino** is slated to assume his new role within 30 days as he transitions from his current position.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Michael Giardino

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael A. Giardino** is listed below.]

Rochester Examiner (NY)

February 16, 2012

Positive things are happening in Brockport

Author/Byline: Unknown

10. Leadership by Politicians and Community Members:

* Excellent, qualified people assuming leadership.

* Hiring of **Mike Giardino**, Village Manager/Treasurer, who brings a level of professionalism to the village every day.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
January 7, 2011

Jets, noise, commerce to increase - Winter brings influx of trainees, retirees

Author/Byline: Adam Linhardt

Lower Keys skies will roar back to life this weekend as the previously quiet few weeks over the holidays give way to Naval Air Station Key West's busy season. Each year the North's cold, gray and snow-filled skies send many squadrons south to the Boca Chica Key base to take advantage of the clear weather.

The annual migration sends as many as 900 pilots and support personnel per day into town to eat and shop as well. "Weather up North [is] so miserable, and having been stationed up there, I know what it's like," said Executive Officer Cmdr. **Mike Giardino**, originally from Rochester, N. Y. "The squadrons can come down here and really bang out sorties and get more done in three weeks than they can in three months up North." This winter has been particularly brutal in the Midwest and Northeast, where record snows shut down airports, and freezing temperatures have made flights for one Canadian F/ A-18 Hornet squadron impossible. That Alberta-based squadron is headed to Key West to take advantage of Keys weather. "They told us it got so cold up there that the exhaust from launching just two aircraft created a fog on the airfield that is so thick no other aircraft could take off for an hour or more," **Giardino** said.

Along with many naval squadrons and their F/ A-18 Super Hornets, many Air Force squadrons, possibly one Marine squadron and the famed Army 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, which flies helicopters, are all heading to Key West. There may also be an aircraft carrier stationed off the coast of South Florida in the coming weeks, doing its own training, but flights sometimes are diverted from a carrier to Key West for maintenance or other issues, which could translate into even more air traffic, base spokesman Jim Brooks said.

As many as four different Air Force squadrons are already scheduled to arrive in the next four weeks, he said. On the heels of "Hell Week" - the busy days between Christmas and New Year's - local businesses, particularly restaurants - can expect hundreds of military personnel to flood into town. "We have no galley on base, so all those people receive a daily food per diem (stipend)," **Giardino** said.

As the base fills with squadrons, the RV parks on Trumbo Point and Sigsbee Park are also filling with mostly retired former military personnel, Brooks said. There are about 300 RVs in town already, and that number is expected to swell to at least 500 by next week, Brooks said. "You're going to see a lot more military traffic overhead and in town for sure," Brooks said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael A. Giardino** is listed below.]

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
October 31, 2010

Sailor returns home after dangerous detail in Afghanistan - BOCA CHICA

Author/Byline: Adam Linhardt

"You're the eyes and ears for the rest of the guys up there [in the turret] and it's something you take very seriously."

The recent violence coincided with recent elections as insurgents moved across Pakistan for what Woods described as their "fighting season." Woods' service in the Paktika province did not escape the attention of senior leadership, including that of Naval Air Station Key West Executive Officer **Michael Giardino**, who has completed two tours elsewhere in Afghanistan. "There are some provinces in my favorite central Asian country that aren't too bad," **Giardino** said. "Paktika, Khost and Kunar ain't them. This MA (Master-at-Arms) was on the front line." Woods' team stormed two improvised bomb areas and shut them down - a point of pride, he said.

"That's a good feeling," Woods said. "Most of our people are getting hurt by those [bombs], as well as the villagers." Woods volunteered for the mission, which scores points with supervisors, said Chief Petty Officer James Blagg. "Doing what he did reflects tremendously on his future ability to get a raise," Blagg said. "It's a tough, scary job and he raised his hand." Woods' wife, Selene, and their two children, Anthony, 6, and Mia, 3, were in Chicago and not able to meet him at the airport, but Woods credited his family for inspiring his decision to volunteer. I want my kids to be proud of my service and know that you don't always take the easy route; sometimes you stand up and make a difference," Woods said.

Woods planned to go to a Key West restaurant first thing, he said. "I'm going to Mattheessen's (4th of July Ice Cream) and get a Midwest burger and grasshopper sundae before I call my wife to rub it in a little," Woods said laughing. "That's our favorite place."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**Michael Giardino***(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

New York Daily News (NY)

May 23, 2010

REVERSE COURSE - Marine Park golf green changes tune after rejecting kids program

Author/ Byline: Simone Weichselbaum

A CITY-OWNED golf course that turned away a black golf coach who wanted to teach minority kids with special needs the sport wants a mulligan after a Daily News inquiry about the rejection. Marine Park Golf Course in Brooklyn - a 18-hole park that investigators had tied to the mob during a 2007 probe - snubbed coach Charles Lightfoot's proposal in a March 3 e-mail. Lightfoot said he never heard from Marine Park again. "I was shocked and I was disappointed," said Lightfoot, 56, head of the Advanced Lesson Academy of Golf and a freelance golf journalist. "They think golfing isn't for us," he said.

Lightfoot designed the 10-week Junior Scholarship Program to help children suffering from a range of mental disorders, from attention deficit to autism, use golf as a tool to learn how to focus. Admission is free and would be a city first if Lightfoot finds a public golf course to sign on. Marine Park was Lightfoot's first choice because it's the only Brooklyn public course with a driving range. Lightfoot said he wanted to make his classes accessible to local families. "Inner-city kids need to have opportunity. They don't get to see these things," Lightfoot said.

Mel Rodriguez, whom Lightfoot tapped to be a "mentor to parents" in his new program, agreed, and is taking steps to see that his young son Emilio learns the game. The elder Rodriguez said that mastering golf at an early age can pay personal dividends later in life. Lisa Maynard, 42, and her daughter Makiya, 11, were looking forward to hitting golf balls this summer. The Maynards were heartbroken when they learned the budding program wasn't working out. "My daughter doesn't have any friends but me," said Lisa Maynard about her little girl, who suffers from autism. "She needs friends and I want to interact with other parents who understand."

The Parks Department oversees Marine Park and another dozen or so courses throughout the city. A department spokesman referred all questions about the rejection to Marine Park. Marine Park course manager Michael Watkins cited the course's "different academic golf clinics" as the reason behind the refusal in his March 3 e-mail to Lightfoot. When reached by phone last week, Watkins said he thought Lightfoot's program had nothing to do with kids. However, a reporter read him his old e-mail that said: "Being the golf professional here I appreciate any efforts to grow the game of golf especially with kids. We here at Marine Park wish you the best in locating a home for your program." Watkins then suddenly changed his old veto into a new possibility. "It wasn't a definitive no," he said, before handing the phone off to his apologetic boss, **Michael Giardino**. Said **Giardino**: "If Mr. Lightfoot wants to speak to us in depth about it, we are very willing to talk to him." For his part, Lightfoot said he is open to forgiveness. "My concern is the kids," he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
Michael Giardino
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Michael A. Giardino** is listed below.]

Key West Citizen, The (FL)
July 4, 2007

Declarations of - Independence

Author/Byline: Traci Rork

Freedom to live

Mike Giardino had been working at the Pentagon for just six weeks when it happened. "Suddenly the building shook and we heard an explosion," said **Giardino**, now the executive officer of Naval Air Station Key West on Boca Chica Key.

When he looked out his window, he saw smoke and, strangely, paper flying through the air about 100 to 150 yards away. "Turned out that I was looking at the area directly above where the plane came to rest - directly below our old office space that we had vacated in July," he said.

Sept. 11 - the terrorist attack, the chaotic aftermath of gathering colleagues and fleeing from the building - that is the day he truly gained an appreciation for what life must have been like in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

"We are fortunate to have our way of life and we are thankful for those who are charged with its preservation," said **Giardino**, who recently completed two tours in Afghanistan. "Freedom is precious. Kids, especially little girls, now walk freely to school in Kabul. They play in the streets; they wave at us when we drive by."

They weren't the only ones to express their gratitude to **Giardino**. Soon after the 9/11 attacks, he was in his uniform, waiting for the subway when he locked eyes with a woman sitting on a bench. She quietly offered a simple, "Thank you." "I smiled and said, 'You're welcome.' "

Research Compiled by: Shannon Farr
 Colin Baenziger & Associates