

Remembering 9/11

It's a breeze!

WICHITA MID-CONTINENT AIRPORT

the windsock
A WICHITA MID-CONTINENT AIRPORT ONLINE PUBLICATION



Every community across America was impacted by the tragic events that took place on September 11, 2001. Most likely you can remember vividly where you were when you heard the news. While America watched in horror as the World Trade Center collapsed, airports across the U.S. were dealing with thousands of unexpected flights that were forced to land immediately. I'd like to share our story.

We were just getting to work on that Tuesday morning when news reports started coming in (about 8:00 a.m. CST) that a plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. At about 8:20 a.m., we received word that the Federal Aviation Administration ordered all flights to land. Soon after the announcement, planes started landing at Mid-Continent. Within a relatively short amount of time, a total of 22 passenger aircraft and seven cargo planes had landed, and roughly 1,320 passengers unexpectedly arrived in Wichita.

Jerry Hudson was here on that day. Jerry is the Assistant Building Maintenance Superintendent. Jerry recalls, "Like most everyone else, we couldn't believe what had just happened, but before the reality could sink in, all airlines were ordered to land. Immediately things got pretty hectic and we were so busy we didn't get to focus on all the news reports that were coming in. The most vivid memory for me here at the airport was all the aircraft landing and parking on the ramps and taxiways."

Mike Boes, Environmental Manager, recalls being in his office when his wife called and wanted to know if it was

true that the World Trade Building had been struck by a jet. "I turned on the radio and sat in stunned silence to the report of the second aircraft hitting the second tower and soon after reports of the Pentagon and the jet forced down into a field by those brave passengers. The anger for the cowardice actions of the terrorists and sorrow for those lost was short lived due to information that all aircraft were being diverted to the nearest airfields and the skies cleared of non essential aircraft. Seeing aircraft of all design landing at our airport and the numerous and seemingly flawless actions it took to land, taxi, and park aircraft,



Diverted aircraft - United and Air Canada

plus deplaning, and providing food and shelter for the passengers was amazing. At the time it was a blur with all of us helping where needed in a flurry of pizza boxes and bottled water. The outpouring of help from Wichita businesses and manpower was a proud moment. Wichita is truly a special place in time of need. I don't believe I heard a complaint from those working or from those inconvenienced by the terroristic actions of the day. I will forever remember the absolute silence of the airfield and standing on the apron with the aircraft parked as if we had been converted into an Arizona aircraft bone yard."



Diverted aircraft - American Airlines and America West

The terminal was teeming with passengers. Many volunteers from the City of Wichita, Salvation Army, and Sedgwick County Emergency

Management arrived to help. Airport and airline personnel were busy unloading passengers and baggage, finding parking places for all diverted aircraft and assisting passengers to hotels and motels. Calls flooded our phone lines from people in Wichita and the surrounding area who offered their homes to these stranded passengers. The outpouring of concern for these strangers was truly heartwarming. City buses transported passengers to area hotels. By early afternoon most passengers had vacated the terminal.



Diverted aircraft - TWA and American

Working with Cox, we were able to provide this service in less than five hours after all aircraft were grounded."

Wednesday the Airport was like a ghost town. No flights were operating and no passengers were in the terminal. Airport Safety Division was busy implementing new FAA security measures that day. It took them just 9 ½ hours to successfully implement the new measures, which meant by 6:00 p.m. Wednesday the airport was in compliance. This occurred before any airline had received FAA approval to fly.

Our IT Manager, Jorge Munevar, remembers having to change the Flight Information Display System (FIDS) – these are the arrival and departure screens – to display “all flights are cancelled.” Jorge says he needed to find a way to help stranded passengers communicate. In the former gate #9, which is now named The Flight Deck, several phones were placed for people to contact family and friends. “I contacted Cox Communications and asked them if they would provide us with Internet access. Cox provided the cable modem and the access for free in the Administration Building. From there the Internet service was extended to the terminal via airport infrastructure. I borrowed two PCs from the City and connected them to the Internet service. That was a hit with passengers; they were able to check e-mails, make reservations, etc.

There was one flight in particular that stands out – an El Al flight from Israel. The flight departed JFK and was supposed to land at LAX. There were 123 people on that flight, mostly Israelis. Jerry Hudson remembers: “They sat on the taxiway for a long period of time. The people did not want to get off the plane. They feared they would be viewed by some as the enemy. When they were finally convinced to come in the terminal, we took them to the mezzanine, where they remained most of the day. We had to bring all of their luggage up to the mezzanine for them and since they were on an extended vacation to the States, they had a lot of luggage. The people were extremely nice and were so sorry about what had happened. Coming from Israel, they had experienced many acts of war and terror so they were very sympathetic and had many stories. I remember Mayor Knight bringing out pizzas for them and, of course, the people insisted we stay with them and share a pizza. I remember a lady pointing out some fellow travelers and telling me to try not to hold grudges against all the people because most were good people. The fellow travelers were Palestinians.”



Diverted aircraft - US Airways and JetBlue

One airport employee brought coloring books and crayons for the kids.

I can remember one elderly Israeli lady who was frightened and in tears. She could not speak English and I felt badly for her. The Rabbi from the local Jewish Federation had been contacted and came to the airport to interpret and provide assistance. Members of the Jewish Federation brought kosher food for them. Arrangements were made for them to stay at Camp Hiawatha, a Salvation Army facility.



Diverted cargo planes on north cargo ramp

The City of Wichita could not have been more accommodating. City buses took the Israelis to Exploration Place, Cowtown Museum, and Sedgwick County Zoo – all were free admission. In the evening a small group even went line dancing at a cowboy bar. (Read [“The Week the Israelis came to Wichita”](#)).

On Thursday, the El Al flight departed Wichita. The elderly lady who was frightened and in tears was now all smiles and waving the American flag. Later, the people of the flight sent a thank you note that was published in the [Wichita Eagle](#), sharing their gratitude for the kindness shown to them while they were in Wichita, and how fortunate they were to have landed here.

On Thursday most of the diverted airplanes were able to depart. The first diverted flight with passengers left early that afternoon with more flights leaving throughout the day. With many people renting cars, fewer people flew out than had arrived.

As a result of 9/11, the Airport Safety Division has increased staffing from 30 to 47 to meet the new Federal security requirements. Security checks and patrols throughout the Airport have greatly increased. Now all employees at the airport undergo criminal history background checks and fingerprinting, and the badging process and requirements are more stringent.

Needless to say, the biggest impact on airports and the airline industry is the formation of the Transportation Security Administration. While their screening processes continue to evolve, they have done an excellent job in helping keep air travel safe in America.

Passenger traffic for the month of September 2001 fell 37% at Mid-Continent Airport, and in the years following 9/11, several airlines filed for bankruptcy.

We remember . . .

- American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston Logan to Los Angeles, and the 92 people who died when it crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center
- United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston Logan to Los Angeles, and the 65 people who died when it crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center
- American Airlines Flight 77 from Washington Dulles to Los Angeles, and the 64 people who died when it crashed in the Pentagon
- United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark to San Francisco, and the 44 people who died when it crashed in to a rural Pennsylvania field
- 2,595 people in the World Trade Center who died
- 125 civilians and military personnel at the Pentagon who died
- 343 NYFD firefighters and paramedics who died
- 23 NYPD police officers who died
- 37 Port Authority police officers who died
- The families who lost loved ones
- Our courageous men and women in the military who have made the ultimate sacrifice, those who continue to fight the war on terrorism, and the families they leave behind.



TSA Unveils Original World Trade Center Memorial to Commemorate 10th Anniversary of 9/11

On Wednesday, September 7, 2011, the TSA held a ceremony to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11. At the ceremony, the TSA unveiled a stunning memorial that incorporates a section of a steel I-beam from the World Trade Center.



Governor Sam Brownback

Governor Sam Brownback was the guest speaker at the event and spoke about the reaction in Washington when Congress heard the news. He said that it was a time when Congress was united and responded with an almost unanimous vote to wage war against the Taliban. Scott Johnson, TSA General Manager, Field Operations from TSA headquarters in Washington, DC also attended as a guest speaker, and said that in Wichita last year, 850,000 people were screened; that's 1.7 million shoes. Area TSA Director Mark Haight was also present.

Artists Bruce and Brent Bitter of B&B Metal Arts in Hoisington, Kansas created the memorial and donated their time to this effort. There are five main design elements in the memorial: the words "We Will Never Forget", a flag of 9 stars and 11 stripes to remember the 9-11 attack, the World Trade Center

towers, an eagle with wings outstretched as in flight, and a 24-inch section of the I-beam artifact placed in the clutches of the eagle, all arranged on a four-foot diameter circle made of stainless steel and mounted on a stainless steel pedestal. The piece is treated to create color in the flag and the body of the eagle.

The memorial will be displayed in the corridor that leads to baggage claim, next to The Landing restaurant. Mid-Continent Airport will be the first TSA airport to have a World Trade Center artifact incorporated into a memorial piece.



Artists Bruce and Brent Bitter posing with the memorial

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