

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Proposals for Hangars Received

The Airports Department issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to construct new hangars at both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports. Not only did we publish notices in the Union Democrat and the Modesto Bee, we mailed the RFP package to everyone that had expressed interest in building hangars at either airport.

The RFP included five hangar projects comprised of 34 hangars with a total area of 57,000 square feet at Columbia Airport, and five hangar projects comprising 16 hangars with a total area of 33,000 square feet at Pine Mountain Lake Airport. Developers could propose on a single hangar project or multiple projects. The RFP process also allowed a developer to propose the ground lease rate and the reversion time period (the number of years after which the hangar ownership would revert to the County).

With all the concern about there not being any hangars to rent and all the interest expressed in building new hangars I was surprised that we only received three proposals out of the 45 proposal packages mailed out. In fact I was extremely surprised that we only receive one proposal that included a PML hangar project.

A proposal review committee was established that included representatives from the Airports Department, the Airports Advisory Committee, Public Works, Community Development, County Counsel, and County Administration. This committee rated each proposal according to a selection matrix that was included in the RFP and a developer was selected. We are now in the process of approving an Option to Lease that will allow the developer to begin planning

his projects and obtain the needed building permits. The developer will build hangars along the grass runway and on the southwest side of the airport at Columbia, and the row of T-hangars at Pine Mountain Lake Airport.

Father's Day Fly-In

The 42nd Annual Father's Day Fly-In will be on Saturday June 14th. Unlike previous years, this year's Fly-In will be a one day event. The theme is "Celebrating Homebuilt and Light Sport Aircraft" and we will have some great examples of these aircraft in our display area for all to see. The airport will be closed from 12 noon until 3 PM for flight demonstrations which will include warbird flights, CAL FIRE water drops, an Air Med helicopter demonstration, the famous airplane vs. car race, and much more. A temporary tower will be in operation and the tower frequency will be 127.9 and the ground frequency will be 121.05.

Tenants that occupy tiedowns on the ramp should plan to relocate their aircraft across the field to the area west of Tanker 76 no later than Wednesday June 11th. Tenants that are located in tiedowns 68 through 98 do not need to move their planes.

As always, we are in need of volunteers to help at the Fly-In. There are many jobs that need to be done including, set-up, driving shuttles, staffing the information booth, parking planes, working the admissions gates, hospitality, and more. If you have never volunteered for the Fly-In before, come help out. It is a lot of fun. Volunteer forms are available in the Airport office and on our website www.fathersdayflyin.com.

Guest Speaker at the PMLAA

I was invited to speak at the Pine Mountain Lake Aviation Association's April meeting on the subject of airport funding. It is difficult to make a budget talk interesting, especially when the audience had just finished a meal. Afterwards, several people told me that they learned a lot about how the Airports Department operated and how we divide up our staff time between Columbia Airport and Pine Mountain Lake Airport. The airport presents a tough challenge to operate and maintain due to its limited revenue sources. I did talk at length about the FAA's determination that the PML Airport was not eligible for FAA Airport Improvement Grant funding which will make it a challenge to finance future capital improvement projects.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Poor Preflight Planning

Many of you may have heard about the Roman Catholic priest who disappeared after floating into the sky under hundreds of helium filled party balloons. According to news reports, the priest at one point soared to an altitude of 20,000 feet (6,000 meters). He planned to fly to a city located 465 miles from his take-off point but was blown in another direction, out to sea.

The priest reportedly had a GPS, a satellite phone, a buoyant chair and was an experienced skydiver. It was reported that the satellite phone battery ran low and he did not know how to operate the GPS. This flight was intended to be a fund raiser for his parish but instead brought bad publicity to his cause.

Like nearly every accident, this one was a series of errors that added up to become a fatal disaster. The first thing that comes to mind is that the priest was inexperienced at this type of flying which by itself is very dangerous. Without previous knowledge of how to design and fly such an aerial apparatus one could expect that the outcome would not be too promising. The simple

fact that he was reported to have reached an altitude of 20,000' but did not carry oxygen suggests the lack of knowledge of what he was doing.

His flight took him out to sea instead of inland as he had planned. Did he check the winds aloft? If he did, without knowing at what altitude he was going to reach, the wind information was useless.

Bringing a satellite phone and a GPS was a good idea, but failing to make sure he had enough battery power to last him the trip and not knowing how to operate his GPS showed a great deal of stupidity. If his flight took him above an overcast layer, he would not know where he was without the GPS. Knowing how to operate the GPS was critical to his safe flight. As an alternative, he could have left both the satellite phone and GPS behind and taken along an operating ELT so his entire flight could have been tracked.

It was reported that he was an experienced skydiver, but he apparently did not have a parachute. So that stated experience is completely irrelevant to the flight.

My final thought is that he floated up to 20,000' which was most likely the service ceiling of his helium balloon powered chair. The priest probably passed out due to oxygen starvation, then froze to death due to exposure, all due to poor preflight planning.

I certainly hope all our local pilots take their preflight activities seriously. Doing so goes a long way toward making your flight safe and successful.

The Manager's Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

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