

THE AIRPORT:

All Grown Up

SACRAMENTO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT IS IN THE MIDST OF A MAKEOVER. WE EXPLORE THE TRANSFORMATION. *By Esther Chapman*

Nestled in the fields north of Sacramento, plain and unassuming, Sacramento's largest airport has long been treated like the girl next door. She's convenient and approachable and friendly enough, but not exactly exciting. Not the kind of airport you'd consider for a major trip, like a coast-to-coast flight or a tropical vacation.

Well, get a load of Sacramento International Airport, all grown up. With a jazzy new terminal, an attractive new parking garage and a growing list of carriers and flights, SMF (Sacramento Metropolitan Field) has matured into a pretty sexy option for the region's travelers—not just Sacramentans but even those highfalutin Bay Area folks. Our little airport has, in fact, developed.

And the best part is, the extreme makeover has only just begun.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAYSONCARPENTER.COM/MODEL FROM CAST IMAGES





IF YOU BUILD IT . . .

The original proponents of then-Sacramento Metropolitan Airport would have found some poetic justice in seeing their enterprise become a major player in the California aviation industry. Their idea

was called extravagant, risky and ill-planned. After all, who would drive 10 miles out of town to catch a flight?

Within a few months of the airport's opening in 1967, however, the skeptics were proven wrong. The estimated 750,000 annual passengers that had seemed so unrealistic blew passed the 1 million mark by the year's end. And the 6,000 acres that had been considered ridiculously unnecessary allowed the airport to grow at a healthy clip throughout the next three decades.

Curiously, even the Sept. 11, 2001, tragedy that wreaked havoc on the airline industry seemed to work in SMF's favor. Its primary carrier, Southwest, chose to maintain its flight schedule while other airlines cut flights. Meanwhile, Sacramento's Capitol-driven economy proved more resilient and faster-growing than other Western cities'. Within two years of 9/11, SMF had become one of the few airports in the nation to add several new airlines to its carrier list. Once again, the "girl next door" surpassed expectations.

"The forecast after 9/11 said we would grow 4 percent per year (in passengers). We've been surpassing 5 to 6 percent," says Hardy Acree, director of airports for the Sacramento County Airport System, who says the airport has served 10,225,000 passengers in the past 12 months. "Now we just need the additional facilities to accommodate that growth."



A JEWEL IN THE CROWN

Those additional facilities may not be long in coming. Since 2000, Acree and his colleagues on the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors have been working diligently to develop a master plan that plots growth for the airport through the year 2020. If all goes as hoped, the plan could be approved and at least partially funded as early as 2007, which would clear the way for construction to begin. Some of the first projects to be completed would be:

- A new terminal to replace the aging Terminal B. Passengers using this new terminal will check in at a central terminal, then be transported by an automated people mover system (tram) to a remote concourse.
- A parking garage to serve passengers at the new terminal.
- An expansion of the east runway for larger aircraft. This will accommodate current cargo aircraft (such as FedEx) that require longer runways to take off in certain conditions. It also will clear the way for more international flights, whose larger aircraft also require longer runways.
- A state-of-the-art air-traffic control tower to replace the current one, which was built in 1967.

• An upper-end hotel to attract conferences and business travelers.

"Our vision is that [the new terminal] will be a jewel in the crown of the Sacramento Valley," says Sacramento County Executive Terry Schutten, who oversees the airports. "We're looking at creating an architectural piece that's really outstanding."

The county has hired a high-profile architectural firm, Corgan Associates, in hopes of

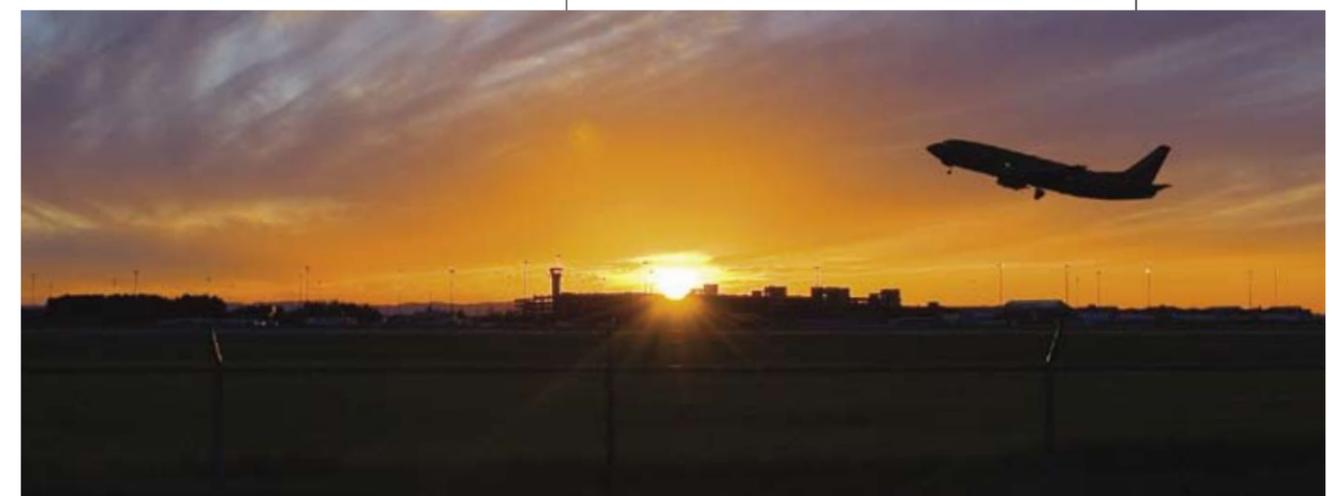


procuring an eye-catching design that plays off Sacramento's unique landscape and identity. Schutten says even old-stock redwood salvaged from a local bridge will be used in the new terminal, "probably as a wall covering or piece of art."

Airport officials are optimistic that the first improvements—including the new terminal—could be completed by 2010. Yet to many travelers and industry experts, the renewal of SMF has already begun. The attractive new Terminal A (opened in 1998) and parking garage (opened

in 2004) have made traveling both more convenient and more aesthetically pleasing. And the abundance of art throughout the airport has made even waiting less painful.

"Even the landscaping looks gorgeous. I feel very proud as I'm driving a client to our airport," says Patricia Howard, director of corporate operations for Giselle's Travel. "Personally, I'm very impressed with the direction the airport is taking. It is growing and becoming a force to be reckoned with—like our city itself."



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EST OF THE BEST



BEST LAST-MINUTE GIFT →

Bring your host or client something typically Sacramento from the Capitol Marketplace (Terminal A) or Capitol Travel Mart (Terminal B1). Hot items include the “I’ll Be Baaaack” or “The Govenator” T-shirts sporting the image of our governor in Terminator pose. Democrats may prefer an Arnold bobblehead.

← BEST PLACE TO WAIT

If you have time to kill, grab a table at the Prospector’s Pub, a new restaurant and bar located between B1 and B2 entrances. Just beware: With its stylish black and cherry-wood decor—plus a steady menu of CNN—it may make you forget you have a plane to catch.



PROSPECTOR'S PUB

t HE \$5 HAMBURGER AND OTHER TALES

With fewer airlines offering meals these days, it’s almost inevitable that you’ll have to grab a snack at the airport now and then. But everyone knows you pay double for airport food.

Or do you?

Actually, airport food is not quite the racket you might have imagined. Yes, you will pay more than you would for the identical meal in your neighborhood. But Sacramento International Airport has signed a contract with its concessionaire, HMS Host, requiring prices to stay within 10 percent of “street prices.”

“They have to submit annually a survey showing they are within that range. Our staff also goes out periodically to make sure prices are in line,” explains airport spokesperson Karen Doron.

HMS Host is likewise charged with keeping quality and customer service in line with the name brands they offer. So, that Starbucks latte should taste like a Starbucks latte anywhere else. And ditto the Burger King fries.

Good news? That’s for you to decide.



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MOST COMFORTABLE SEAT

Passengers leaving from Terminal A will be lucky to snag one of the cushioned armchairs located between gates A12 and A14. There’s a Java City to supply the caffeine. Bring your laptop or a good book and you’ll be waiting in comfort.

BEST KID-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES →

If you’re traveling with kids, Terminal A is the place to be. You’ll find play areas near gates A2 and A10, and a toy store that welcomes little browsers. For some creative play, try whispering secrets to each other under the Whisper Dome, which is located immediately after the security checkpoint. Stand there and whisper and your voice will be amplified several times over.

BEST WAY TO WI-FI

The airport offers wireless Internet access throughout its public areas for \$6.95 a day. To use it, simply launch your browser anywhere within the airport and you’ll receive a log-in page and instructions. Hot tip: Check with your personal or business wireless carrier to see if it already has an agreement with the airport’s wireless provider, Airport Network Solutions. For more information, check out the Wi-Fi FAQs at sacairports.org.

BEST TRAVEL DEALS FROM SACRAMENTO

Few people fully understand the dark art of airline pricing. But travel agents agree on one thing: You’ll get the best deals wherever Southwest flies. Not that you have to fly Southwest, but that airline tends to set the pricing bar for its competitors. Consider a vacation in Florida (airfares are as low as \$198 round trip) or Portland, Ore. (with fares as low as \$39 each way).



WHISPER DOME



PLAY AREA

WHAT'S NEW IN SECURITY

Now

Do you like a little wind in your hair? Then you won't mind the Transportation Security Administration's latest security equipment at the airport. The new explosive trace portal machines (aka "puffers") are walk-through booths that blow bursts of air on the passenger, then check the air for explosive-type particles. Not all passengers are "puff-worthy"—only those selected for secondary screening. TSA says the machines will reduce the number of hand and body-wand searches.

Coming Soon

A new baggage screening system now being installed at SMF will once again make baggage checks a one-stop process. The new in-line system allows baggage to undergo the highest level of screening while moving on a conveyor belt. So say goodbye to those bulky screening machines in the lobbies. You'll check your bag at the ticket counter and be on your way.

A Future Look

TSA isn't saying much, but the buzz is that a registered traveler program using biometric technology is the security of the future. What does that mean? Travelers who go through an advanced screening process will be able to pass through security a bit quicker using an iris scan or fingerprint. Pilot programs were under way in five airports, but now the program is back "under evaluation," according to TSA spokesperson Nico Melendez. Stay tuned.



a AIRPORTS AND ART

You may have noticed the precarious tower of suitcases in the Terminal A baggage claim area or the whimsical birds adorning the new parking garage. But did you know the Sacramento International Airport actually has eight works of art permanently on display? That cultural jackpot is made possible thanks to Sacramento's Art in Public Places program, which requires that 2 percent of the construction budget for public projects be allocated for art.

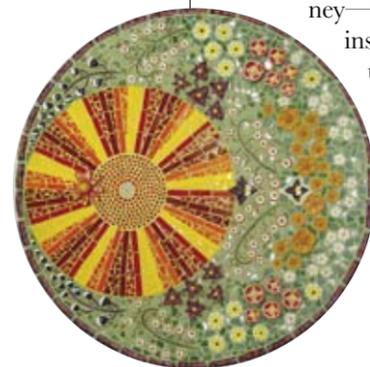
Every time the airport makes building improvements, its staff works with Linda Bloom, the APP administrator, to commission new works of art. "We look for works that are engaging, timeless and that speak to Sacramento as a unique cultural and environmental destination," Bloom says. "We also work with the architect to make sure there's a marriage between art and architecture. Every piece is place- and site-specific."

Docent-led tours of the airport art are available by contacting the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission at (916) 566-3992. Or try to arrive a bit early for your next flight and take time to browse on your own. Here's what to see:

* TERMINAL A

"Chromatic Oasis" by Christopher Janney—This interactive sound and light installation of colored glass is located under the skylight at the top of the escalators.

"Flying Carpet" by Seyed Alavi—A wool carpet depicting an aerial view of the Sacramento River covers the walkway connecting Terminal A with the parking garage.



GOING WITH THE FLOW

"River's Edge" by Gregory Kondos—Colored- and etched-glass panels showing images of the river run along the transom facing the parking garage.

"Traveling Light" by Les Birleson—Lighted sculptures representing the diversity of travel hang above the Southwest Airlines ticket counters.

"Sampson" by Bryan Goggins—Floor-to-ceiling sculptures created from suitcases grace the baggage claim area.

* PARKING GARAGE

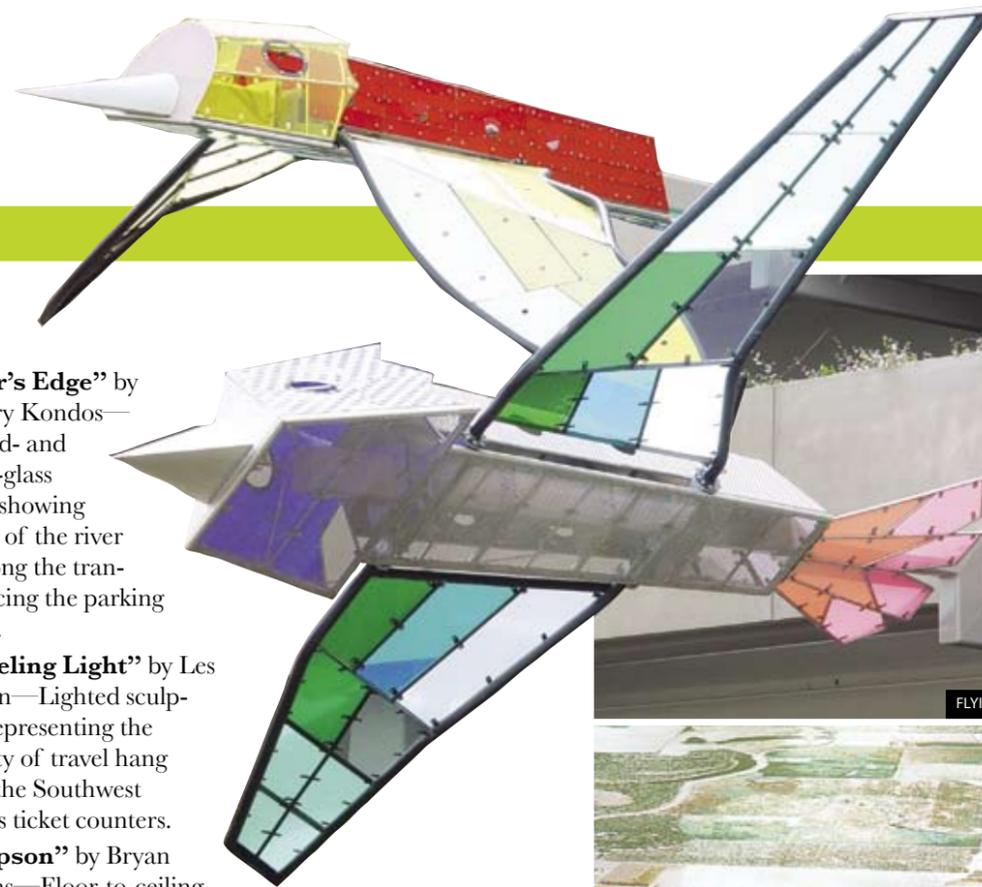
"Flying Gardens" by Dennis Oppenheim—Twelve steel, lexan and plexiglass birds with 20-foot wingspans are outside the garage facing the terminal.

* INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS BUILDING

"Winged One" by Camille Vandenberg—Bronze statue combines human, animal and mechanical imagery.

* TERMINAL B

"Going With the Flow" by Mark Rivera—Five tile mosaics show how systems interact together to make a whole, from nature to people to agriculture. View them near the restaurants in the CPS building, which connects B1 and B2.



FLYING GARDENS



WINGED ONE



FLYING CARPET



RIVER'S EDGE



SAMPSON