



Courtesy photo

Stainless steel handrails span the spaces between massive steel columns that are 14 inches square.

(Click picture for full size image)

Office building for aircraft owners takes off

by RaeAnne Marsh

Six hangars right on the Northwest Airpark taxiway will give six condo owners the convenience of easy access to Deer Valley Airport when Skip Rimsza's Deer Valley Air Center is completed the end of this year.

Located on the three-and-a-half acres at the southeast corner of 19th Avenue and Knudsen Drive, the building will total approximately 60,000 square feet divided into six office-hangar condos. Offices will front northward to Knudsen, and the hangars will face southward to the airport across Williams Drive.

Condos were not part of the initial plan, said Rimsza, eschewing the designation of "developer" and explaining he'd bought the land from the perspective of "user." The project came out of his interest in flying, which he'd gotten into with flying lessons in January 2004, after leaving the office of Mayor of Phoenix. Already looking at an Airpark location for his business, he snapped up this property when it became available. Said Rimsza, "I thought, 'I'll need a place to put my airplane,'"—with additional space he'd make available for lease.

But all units have been sold as condos, and the sales were achieved with no advertising, according to Rimsza. "People, based in Deer Valley and around the country, who had aircraft, found out about the project and contacted me." The project, he explained, caters especially to the needs of professionals like himself who own businesses in scattered locations.

Building with an eye primarily for his own use, all decisions regarding design and materials came down on the high side. "I always went for the best," said Rimsza, confirming the experience related by Bill Clay, president and owner of Bill Clay Design Studio, whose company provided complete design and architectural services. Said Clay, "Every option we asked for—when we said, 'We think it'd be really cool to ...,' he said, 'Yes.'" Groundbreaking was this past May. The building that has been taking shape since then is noteworthy for more than its design.

Constructed of concrete tilt panels, it has the distinction of having involved one of the largest lifts in the state. "The crane operator told us it was the third-largest lift of a concrete structure in the state," related Rimsza, referring to the seven-foot-tall, eighty-foot-long, two-foot-thick header over one of the hangars.

"Most hangars are 70 by 78 feet," said Clay. To put that size space into focus, he shared that one bay will be housing a jet, a helicopter and a prop plane. Hangar doors, he noted, will be 60 by 22 feet and therefore large enough to accommodate larger aircraft.

Height of the offices is approximately 32 feet, and their width lines up with the hangars to their rear at 70 feet, according to Clay. Rimsza, describing his building as "extremely tall," pointed out the ceiling height for both first- and second-floor offices is also extremely high. "When the owners build out (the interior)," said Rimsza, "They can have window access to their hangar from both floors."

The two stories of offices on Knudsen are served by an elevator that's not hidden in the bowels of the building but is front and center and very visible. "We made it a feature element," said Clay. A focal point, in fact. Overhung by a canopy with a frame that stretches far forward to add a visual balance to the linear line of the building front, the elevator stands forward from the building by several feet and is connected by a walkway to the balcony from which the second-floor offices open.

Offices are shielded by an eight- to ten-foot canopy extending across the entire front of the building. Made of a reflective metal, the underside of this horizontal structure adds to the drama of the building's visual impact by providing interesting shadows—not to mention the reflection of the already-imposing glass doors below it.

A tall parapet affords concealment for the building's mechanical elements. The roof will eventually have a full set of solar panels, and the entire building is being pre-wired for photo-voltaic power although only two hangars will be supplied with that energy upon the building's initial occupancy. Of the photo-voltaic opportunity, Rimsza said, "This can only be done because the building is linear east-west (and so) has the exact right sun exposure." He expects to generate more solar power than his building will use, and plans to sell the excess to the utility company.

Fuel for the condos' aircraft will be supplied at a shared fuel farm, and Rimsza noted, "We can fuel any kind of aircraft." Both jet fuel and aviation gasoline (avgas) will be available, with below- and above-wing loading as well as a gas pump.

There is additional convenience (and safety) that Rimsza built in by taking out-thousands of tons of dirt. The hangars open directly onto the Northwest Airpark taxiway, and Rimsza explained, "We needed to lower (the property) to the level of the taxiway."

And a grandfathered agreement enables Deer Valley Air Center its arguably greatest convenience. With post-9/11 airport security measures making access to air fields more restricted, Rimsza's property came with what he believes is the last through-the-gate agreement to access Deer Valley Airport that can be enjoyed by off-site aircraft.

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