
News

2/11/05

Aircraft work goal of new, local school

By DAN HEATH, Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH — Clinton Community College and CV-TEC continue to work toward developing Plattsburgh Aeronautical Institute.

If the Federal Aviation Administration and New York Education Department approve the Part 147 Airframe and Powerplant School, it would be located at Plattsburgh International Airport. It would be only the fifth of its kind in the state and the only one north of the New York City area. Clinton Community College Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development Dave Lawliss said the initiative is much bigger than just the two schools.

"It could be the piece that drives development of the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base. It will definitely help if the community rallies behind this."

To that end, CV-TEC Adult and Special Education Coordinator James McCartney III recently posted initiative information on the CV-TEC Web site. That is a way to share plans with the public and also provide links for the public to send comments to state and federal elected officials.

The two schools have submitted fiscal year 2005-06 appropriations requests totaling \$1.6 million to local, state and federal officials and are seeking donations of tools and equipment. "Equipment acquisition is a big piece of the process right now," McCartney said. "The next concrete step for us is to develop a curriculum."

That is tricky, as the schools need to know what equipment they will be working with before writing the curriculum.

Tentative plans call for allowing juniors from 17 school districts in Clinton, Essex, Washington and Warren counties to spend two years at CV-TEC for general training and the first part of airframe training.

A third year at Clinton Community College would allow them to earn an associate's degree by finishing airframe training and receiving powerplant training.

Adult or college students could satisfy the FAA requirements in two years, although they may need to satisfy humanities requirements if seeking an associate's degree.

"Adult, high-school and college students — this program would serve all three," McCartney said. Lawliss and McCartney have talked with representatives of a similar school, whose startup costs were about \$18 million. "If we can get donated equipment and aircraft, we could save upward of \$10 million," Lawliss said.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site, most airframe or powerplant mechanics are trained at one of 200 FAA-certified trade schools in the United States. About one-third of the schools award two- or four-year degrees in the field.

FAA standards require certified schools to offer students a minimum of 1,900 actual class hours. General instruction accounts for 400 hours, with an additional 750 hours each of airframe and powerplant instruction.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site predicts a bright future for aviation-maintenance technicians who complete certified programs. Retirement over the next decade is expected to lead to several thousand job opportunities per year, with many arising at small commuter and regional airlines, FAA repair stations and in general aviation.

Even if a graduate didn't get a job in the aeronautical industry, the skills acquired — including sheet-metal fabrication, machining, electronics, welding and computer-aided-design or manufacturing — match with many area industries, such as Bombardier and its many suppliers.

The entire proposal still needs approval from the FAA, while the curriculum needs approval from the New York State Department of Education and the State University of New York Central Administration.

The two schools continue to work toward those goals, with a potentially large payoff.

"This is a 'Field of Dreams' kind of idea, where you build it and they will come," Lawliss said. "We need this type of program to take advantage of the facility that is there."

TO LEARN MORE

To look at the details of the Plattsburgh Aeronautical Institute Initiative, go to the CV-TEC Web site at <http://cves.org/cvtec> and look for the link to the initiative under the heading Programs.

For the description of airframe and powerplant mechanics, visit the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site at www.bls.gov. Under the heading Occupations, click on Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Enter aircraft and avionics equipment mechanics and service technicians in the search field to find information on those jobs.

E-mail Dan Heath at: dheath@pressrepublican.com