

In Plane View

Sugar Land Regional Airport Named Nation's Best Airport Operator

Written by Crystal Rawls



The Sugar Land Regional Airport has gained national attention for its unique amenities

The Sugar Land Regional Airport is a cozy sort of place. You won't see the harried travelers rushing to catch their flight or waiting in hard, uncomfortable chairs. Instead, visitors to the Sugar Land Regional Airport (SLRA) relax on couches sipping a coffee or two and even peruse the gift shop. It's no wonder then that more than 2,660 users voted Sugar Land the Nation's Best Airport Operator, as reported in Aviation International News (AIN).

An Elite Distinction

As a fixed-based operator (FBO), SLRA is a service center offering aviation-related services such as aircraft fuel, crew facilities, parking, catering, and more.

"Being part of AIN's 'best-of' list is the gold standard in the corporate aviation industry," says Director of Aviation Phil Savko. "The ranking is the result of an assessment given by pilots familiar with the FBO facilities and services ... this is one of the highest honors that an FBO can receive." SLRA beat out 1,600 other FBO's for the coveted number one position.

"It's pretty significant that last year, we made it to number five, being a city-owned airport. We've unseated some pretty difficult competition," says Savko, adding, "It's always our commitment to improve our services. If a pilot has to wait eight hours, this is the place they want to wait. [Travelers] come off a luxury airplane into a luxury terminal."

Rising to New Heights

Private planes and corporate aircraft regularly stop at SLRA to refuel and gear up for the next flight. In fact, SLRA has caught the attention of more than 100 Fortune 500 companies, including corporate entities such as Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and others, who appreciate the easy fly-in, fly-out access the airport offers. In recent years, SLRA has taken FBO services to a new level, adding more and more amenities to its already extensive offerings, and the world is taking notice.

In addition to the luxury terminal, SLRA boasts a state-of-the-art air traffic control tower and radar system, an instrument landing system, and high-intensity lighting. "Texas Department of Transportation uses this airport as the 'standard' throughout," says Savko. "We continually lead in Texas in terms of projects ... there are not many airports that have done what we've done."

Voters selected Sugar Land's Regional Airport as the Nation's Best Airport Operator



A City Treasure

The City of Sugar Land acquired SLRA, the fourth largest airport in the greater Houston area, in 1991. Savko has served as director of aviation for 11 years, during which time he has overseen the construction of an air traffic control tower, a large corporate hanger, corporate taxiway, and additional parking. Future plans include a half-million square feet of apron on 66 acres of land where they will build taxiway bridges over water – the only airport in the nation with such a unique trait.

Sugar Land Regional Airport's new terminal, which is just three years old, includes a private pilot office, snooze rooms, a theatre room with a video library, a workout room with showers, and a facility for weather briefing and flight planning.

Although owned by the City of Sugar Land, the airport is completely self-sustaining, providing 150 jobs ranging from mechanics to pilots and seeing an average of 300 takeoffs and landings per day. In addition, two rental car agencies operate out of SLRA, making it convenient for corporate travelers to arrange ground transportation upon arrival. "We have a great deal of council and city management support," says Savko. "We're always looking to make it better any way we can." SLRA also supports local artists by showcasing local paintings in the terminal waiting area. The art is rotated every month and is for sale.

Savko hopes Sugar Land families and flight enthusiasts will soon be able to watch planes take off and land at a picnic observation area complete with barbecue pits. In addition, the airport offers a flight school for pilot candidates and an annual Airport Academy, where Sugar Land residents can find out more about day-to-day airport operations. **SLM**

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