

# 'Aerotropolis' at Metro holds exciting potential

What could be the single largest economic development project in Michigan history has been sitting there, right under our nose.

Some time early next year, the new terminal and runways at Wayne County Detroit Metropolitan Airport will go into service, making it one of the premiere passenger hubs in the world. Already renovated, Willow Run Airport, just 12 miles to the east, ranks third in the nation in freight traffic. Link them together by a ring road system based on I-94 to the south and Ecorse Road to the north, and you have a potential economic development district encompassing something like 25,000 acres.

Professor John Kasarda, director of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise at the University of North Carolina and a world authority on airport-driven economic development, has a term for what might happen: an "aerotropolis," an emerging new urban form arising from the competitive advantage that comes from air-based passenger and freight transportation. Kasarda has just signed a consulting contract with Wayne County to help define and market the development potential of the idea. At a meeting last week, Kasarda argued "airports will drive economic development in the 21st century, as much as highways drove it in the 20th century, railroads in the 19th century and seaports in the 18th century."

"Nowhere in the world have I seen anything like the potential Wayne County Metro and Willow Run Airport have if they're put together right. Right now, the two airports aren't leveraged together, but ultimately this will happen. The only question is whether it's in 2010 or 2020," Kasarda concluded.

Communities have already started to grow around international airports to take account of the need for agility and speed in a globalizing business environment. Kasarda pointed to Los Angeles International Airport, responsible for 400,000 jobs and generating \$60 billion in business annually. He also cited Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, virtually a city unto itself.

Work is already under way to bring this dream to reality, at least around Detroit Metro. To the south, Pinnacle Aeropark, a 1,800-acre development in Romulus and Huron Township, is being planned to attract office, commercial and high-tech industrial development, plus hotels and an

18-hole golf course. Wayne County, Romulus, Taylor and Huron Township have contracted with the planning firm, McKenna Associates, to draw up a master plan for a ring road system around Detroit Metro.

But there's a lot more to be done to turn the vision of a two-airport development district into a reality. The ring road system will have to be expanded west, to include I-275 and Wixom Road, just to the west of Willow Run. A sensible business and marketing plan will have to be put together to attract private investment. And vari-

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ous components in the public sector will have to step forward in a serious and coordinated way.

Local communities will have to get cooperatively involved. Already, Romulus, Taylor and Huron Township are cooperating on planning for the ring road around Detroit Metro, but planning will need to include other local government units such as Belleville and Ypsilanti Township.

Wayne County is already on board. Chief Executive Ed McNamara likes the idea and has empowered his economic development whiz, Dewey Henry, to push forward. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is in the process of figuring out how best to help. Money and planning authority will be needed from both the state and federal government.

The window of opportunity for quick action might be relatively narrow. McNamara is not running for re-election; who knows what his successor will do, not to mention the Wayne County Commission. And Gov. John Engler, rumored to be supportive, is in his last year of office; who knows how the new governor will react. But what a way for both men, the most able politicians in recent Michigan history, to get together for a signature project to cap their careers!

What is certain is that this idea is enormous and magnificently compelling for the economic future of Michigan. It deserves enthusiastic support.

**Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net.**



Joni Hubred

## 2002 resolution: To become a believer in the coming year

Every year, I manage to come up with a few New Year's resolutions.

It's usually pretty tame stuff - lose 10 pounds, finish The Novel, call Mom more often. And since I've never been very good at discipline, I usually end up with the same old list.

But 2002 isn't going to be a same old year.

Today's headlines tell me we won't ever live like we did before Sept. 11. Airport security officials are checking people's shoes for explosives. U.S. soldiers are once again dying overseas.

The events of the past few months are just the tip of the iceberg in America. We've been sliding the slippery slope for quite some time.

How is it possible to make sense of a world where parents rent their babies out to drug dealers or leave them unattended in parked cars while they gamble the night away? Where a mother who systematically murders her children vaults into the national spotlight and becomes the cause celebré for a new psychological disorder?

As the economy heads south, as people suffer the effects of living in fear of terrorism, we are faced every day with news we'd just rather not hear. I'd love nothing more than to be the person who brings readers only good news, who gives nothing but encouragement and provides the only bright spot in every Thursday and Sunday.

But journalism is the business of reality. Imperfect and unpredictable, joyous and depressing. It all even out. We have no way of knowing when or how. But it does.

That's what keeps me here, I believe.

I believe in Santa Claus, the real one and his hundreds of helpers who spread joy everywhere they go - like the local elves who donated to the Farmington Goodfellows or the friend of drunk driving victim Kevin Perry, who wrote out a check for \$3,000 to help that young man's family. I believe Christmas, Hanukkah (which - for those of you who read my last column - is an eight-day celebration, not 10), Kwanzaa and Ramadan all celebrate the same, basic philosophy of love, tolerance, self-sacrifice and peace.

I believe the vast majority of us do the best we can in an imperfect world.

I believe every child carries a promise, and it is the responsibility of caring adults to see that promise is delivered. That's why the Call to Action Coalition, Farmington Families in Action and other family-based organizations and programs are so vital to the continued health of our communities.

I believe local elected officials have the best

interests of their cities at heart. These are intelligent, thoughtful people who act out of a sense of civic duty and bear responsibilities most of us wouldn't take on for love nor money.

I believe public employees - particularly emergency services workers - must stick with their jobs out of a love for what they do or a true sense of duty, because I can't imagine any amount of money could make up for the abuse they must sometimes endure.

I believe if everyone who thought about volunteering actually did so, our communities would be

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a much more pleasant place to live.

I believe in forgiveness and understanding, even when a wrong seems unforgivable and impossible to understand.

I believe the balance of power in Washington keeps lawmakers from making really bad decisions, although my confidence in this particular assertion wanes a bit with each passing year.

I believe people like Osama bin Laden will eventually pay a very high price for the anguish they've inflicted on others, because justice is not best administered by human hands.

I believe shedding light on any subject always discloses truth. Sometimes, it just takes a while to clearly see it.

I believe no matter how bad yesterday was, tomorrow is a chance to make it better.

Am I a Pollyanna? Hopelessly optimistic? A dreamer?

Not really.

But being all those things is the only New Year's resolution I'm making this year.

**Joni Hubred is the editor of the Farmington Observer. She can be reached at (248) 477-5450 or by e-mail at jhubred@oe.homecomm.net.**

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