High flying, Oakland-style

Taking pride: *County Executive L. Brooks Patterson was credited with improvements leading up to the rededication of the Oakland County International Airport.*

STAFF PHOTOS BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Looking out: *Taking a look out the loading door of a C-130 Hercules Air Force transport plane are John Seifert of Gaylord, a 19-year pilot, and his friend, Henry Knight of Auburn Hills, an 10-year pilot. Tours of the plane were given at the airport rededication.*

Crowd adds luster to ceremony

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Thunder showers drenched Oakland County International Airport during rededication ceremonies. But the heavy rains failed to significantly dampen spirits of the 200 or so people, who gathered there Monday, to take note of the continuing series of changes that have transformed what used to be a municipal airport into one of the busiest in the country.

New tower: *Guests were allowed to tour the $5.6-million control tower.*

About 0.99 inches of rain fell during the thunderstorms, according to the U.S. National Weather Service, much during the scheduled rededication of Oakland County International, forcing commemoration ceremonies inside.

Guests and dignitaries got wet going from the freshly paved parking areas into the gleaming terminal. And once inside, it was generally standing room only.

But otherwise spirits were high.

"This is a historic occasion," said a beaming L. Brooks Patterson, county executive, who was lauded for maximizing the airport's economic impact — estimated at $100 million last year with a 10 percent increase expected in 1997.

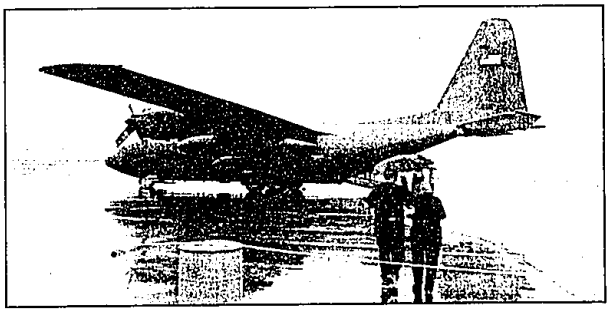
"Oakland County is the economic engine driving Michigan's economy," said U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Hills. "The airport adds horsepower to that engine."

Knollenberg was credited by Patterson as the individual most singularly responsible for bringing full-time customs service to the airport — a change that significantly reduced the amount of down time for incoming international flights.

Previously incoming international flights had to either go to another airport — Detroit Metro or Flint Bishop — to clear customs or summon customs officers to Pontiac. Either option added hours to the process, with busy executives fuming in the meantime.

Since Jan. 2, 1996, when the airport started in house customs service from noon to 8 p.m., customs has cleared 1,202 incoming flights. The number is expected to quadruple this year, according to Patterson.

Although the rains continued through much of the afternoon, it let up enough to allow tours of the C-130 Hercules transport plane parked on the runway. Guests were also invited to tour the new $5.6 million control tower.



In spotlight: *The C-130 Hercules is an Air Force transport plane was on display for tours during the rededication Monday.*

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