

New passenger service takes flight with Oakland County air travelers

BY PAT MURPHY
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The competition for Oakland County's air passenger service is getting keener — and leaning more decidedly toward Bishop International Airport in Flint.

This week marks the beginning of two new passenger services out of Flint — one to Minneapolis and points west, the other to Newark, N.J. and New York City.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, with backing from the business community, played a role in each of the start-ups, as part of a plan to provide area residents with an alternative to congested and user-hostile Metropolitan Airport.

As of Oct. 25, Mesaba Airlines, a commuter line for Northwest Airlines, Inc., began two-a-day flights from Flint to Minneapolis — the corporate headquarters for Northwest and the airline's second largest hub.

As of Oct. 26, Kiwi Airlines, Inc., initiated daily round-trip service from Flint to Newark, a shuttle ride from the Big Apple.

Patterson went to Northwest's corporate offices in July hoping to point out the potential for service out of Flint. The executive was also in contact with Kiwi officials during the strike by Northwest pilots.

To both airlines, Patterson's pitch was similar: Hundreds of customers in Oakland County would prefer to use Bishop Airport once good, reliable service is established.

"We were already looking at

■ (L. Brooks Patterson) pointed out there are 40,000 businesses and 3.2 million people within a 50 mile radius of Flint, with much of that in Oakland County.'

*Michael Palumbo
—Kiwi Airlines*

the possibility of initiating service out of Flint," said Cory Zanin, director of area marketing for Northwest. "But the executive was a catalyst. He was very persuasive."

Of the two airlines, Mesaba very likely required more convincing. While Minneapolis is Northwest's second largest hub, the largest is in Detroit, about 70 miles away. Improved service out of Flint would undoubtedly cut into the customer base at Metropolitan.

"We are aware of that," said Jim Cron, managing director of planning for Northwest. But the airline was also aware that many business travelers out of northern Oakland County and Flint finding alternative means of travel rather than flying Northwest out of Metro.

The airline is gambling that the number of new customers will far out weigh those who switch from Metropolitan to Bishop Airport, said Cron.

Flights will leave Flint at 7:30 a.m. and at 6:35 p.m., and arrive in Minneapolis about 8:07 a.m. and 7:11 p.m., respectively (including time change). The return flights will leave Min-

neapolis at 2:45 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., arriving in Flint at 5:05 p.m. and 9:10 p.m., respectively. Fares will vary.

Kiwi sampled the metro Detroit market for about four weeks during the strike by Northwest, when Kiwi offered service out of Metropolitan Airport.

During that time Patterson was in touch with Kiwi officials telling them of the potential for Oakland County business out of Bishop Airport.

"The executive made us very much aware of the demographics," said Michael Palumbo, director of marketing for Kiwi.

"He pointed out there are 40,000 businesses and 3.2 million people within a 50 mile radius of Flint, with much of that in Oakland County."

If customers are not familiar with Kiwi International Airlines, it's understandable, said Palumbo. The airline was started up after Eastern Airlines went into bankruptcy, leaving personnel looking for work.

But if the airline is short on longevity, its strong suit is experience, said Palumbo. "Our pilots, ground crews and other key personnel have extensive experience."

With one possible exception, he said. "I don't know why the pilots who founded the company would name an airline after a flightless bird."

The Kiwi flight will leave Flint at 7 a.m., arriving in Newark at 8:30 a.m. The return flight leaves New Jersey at 6:30 p.m., with arrival scheduled at 8:10 p.m.

'Little Women' opens at Bonstelle Theatre Dec. 4

"Little Women" opens at the Bonstelle Theatre on Dec. 4. This heartwarming American classic will remind audience members of the real spirit of the holiday season, sharing with family.

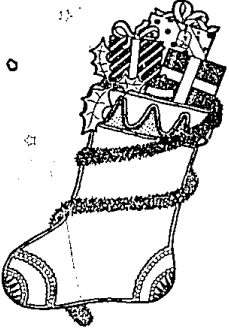
It is the 1860s during the American Civil War, a few days before Christmas, and the March sisters are very excited as they prepare for their celebration. Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy show us

that a family can survive the challenges of socially hard times when life is filled with love and laughter.

"Little Women" is directed by Cynthia Blaise, WSU Department of Theatre's speech and vocal coach. The March sisters are played by Gina Lohman, Maribeth Monroe, Julie Ann Yurconis and Tiffany Marie Bedwell.

"Little Women" runs through Dec. 13. Show times are 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. one selected Saturday and Sunday. Ticket prices range from \$8 to \$10 for adults and \$6 for children 5-12. Group rates are available.

The Bonstelle Theatre is located at 3424 Woodward. For more information or to buy tickets, call (313) 577-2960.



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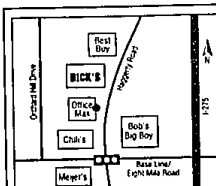
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