

FAQs About the History of Venice Airport

What is the history of aviation in Venice, Florida?

The first recorded flight to Venice delivered fresh strawberries to Hotel Venice on January 13, 1927. That aircraft landed on Nassau Street.

Dr. Fred Albee, the renowned orthopedic surgeon, was a pilot who recognized the value of a community airport. He donated land, near the current sites of Venice High School and Venice Avenue Bridge, where the Civil Aeronautics Authority and the Works Progress Administration constructed markers for the sod runways in January 1936. Later in the year, the Fred Albee Municipal Airport was dedicated with much fanfare. Albee began chartering his patients to his Florida Medical Center, a private orthopedic hospital, in his five-passenger aircraft. It was the first air ambulance service in the world. A hanger, offices, flight training school and repair shop were completed at the grass airfield in 1939.

The Army Air Corps used the same airfield while constructing the Venice Army Air Base (VAAB) in 1942. The base was fully operational by 1943. At its peak, it housed 6,000 airmen who learned to fly P-39s, P-40s, P-47s and P-51 Mustangs. In all, about 20,000 pilots, including some Chinese pilots, learned to fly for the war effort in Venice.

Aviation played a vital role in the development and economy of the city after the Florida land boom of the 1920s, during World War II, and throughout the years that followed.

With the war over, the city was granted a license to operate the airport on May 20, 1946. On June 10, 1947, ownership of the airport was transferred by quit claim deed from the United States of America to the City of Venice under provisions of the Surplus Property Act of 1944. Many of the pilots who trained at the base later returned to Venice where they became residents, business owners and civic leaders.

The Army Air Base leaves a legacy beyond today's airport boundaries. Besides providing the land and much of the infrastructure that is still in use today, the airport was the founding home of the Venice Little Theater in 1950 and operated there until 1972 when it relocated to its current downtown location. Hill and Hill Plumbing also got its start on airport property and is still in business today. The former VAAB chapel building was relocated to become the first building to serve as Epiphany Cathedral. The Triangle Inn accommodated many servicemen and their wives when it was operated as a bed and breakfast.

What types of activities occur at Venice Municipal Airport (VNC)?

VNC is a general aviation airport. General aviation includes all types of civilian aeronautical activities, except for scheduled airline service. VNC does not intend to offer scheduled airline service or large scale cargo service at any point in the future. Examples of general aviation include: privately owned aircraft, business/corporate aviation, charter aircraft, flight training, sightseeing, aircraft repair, medical evacuation/transportation, law enforcement, fire, and search and rescue operations. Twelve aviation businesses currently operate from VNC, including Agape Flights, a non-profit Christian aviation ministry that provides critical supplies to more than 300 missionary families in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas. Learn more about general aviation at [GA Serves America](#).

How much traffic does VNC have?

About 230 aircraft are based at VNC. There are an estimated 60,000 annual takeoffs and landings, as calculated by the airport's traffic counting system that includes sophisticated cameras located along each runway.

The airport is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and 365 days per year. The airport experiences more traffic during the winter months when Venice and surrounding communities attract many visitors and winter residents. VNC is vital to tourism, the area's leading source of economic activity.

What is the role of the City of Venice in airport operations?

The city owns and operates VNC. The city is obligated to operate VNC in accordance with the various deed restrictions and grant assurances as conditions of acquiring the airport from the federal government in 1947 and accepting subsequent grants for airport improvements. Those covenants and grant assurances include the following highlighted provisions:

- The city cannot unreasonably restrict any type of aircraft or aviation business from using the airport.
- The city may not grant an exclusive right to anyone for use of the airport.
- The city may rent facilities not required for airport operations to non-aeronautical users at fair market value.
- The city must operate and maintain the airport in a safe and serviceable condition, not cause or permit any activity that would interfere with airport operations, and must protect and mitigate hazards to aerial approaches.
- No property deeded to the City of Venice for aviation purposes shall be used, leased, sold or otherwise transferred for non-aviation purposes without the written consent of the Federal Aviation Administration.
- All revenues generated by property deeded to the City of Venice, whether by aeronautical or non-aeronautical purposes, must be deposited into an airport dedicated fund and used exclusively for airport operating or capital improvement purposes.
- The federal government reserves the right to make exclusive or non-exclusive use of the airport during a time of war or national emergency.
- The city must abide by the provisions of the Surplus Property Act of 1944 and comply with all applicable federal laws and requirements.
- The city must charge reasonable prices for facilities and services and charge the same rates and fees to each fixed based operator at the airport.
- The city must maintain a rate and fee structure for facilities and services to make the airport as self sustaining as possible in consideration of the circumstances at each particular airport.
- The city is required to maintain an up-to-date Airport Layout Plan (ALP) at all times.

Covenants related to land conveyed to the City of Venice remain in effect in perpetuity. Grant assurances remain in effect for 20 years after completion of the project for which funds were provided. Penalties for non-compliance may include repaying the federal government for certain grants, being ineligible for future grants, or possibly returning ownership and control of VNC back to the federal government or another governing body.

How does VNC generate funding for operations and capital improvements?

VNC is operated as an enterprise fund, meaning that operating and capital budgets are funded entirely by airport operations without any contribution from the city's general tax fund. No city sales tax or property taxes support the opera-

tion of VNC. In fact, VNC pays the city each year for municipal services it receives from some city departments.

Revenues to pay the airport's \$2 million in annual expenses come primarily from land leases, fuel flowage fees and hangar leases. Land leases include aviation tenants and non-aeronautical tenants such as Sharky's restaurant, Lake Venice Golf Club and the Venice Municipal Mobile Home Park.

Capital projects, such as runway and taxiway improvements, are funded primarily by Federal Aviation Administration and Florida Department of Transportation grants. Funds for these grants are generated from aviation fuel taxes, passenger ticket taxes and other federal and state transportation and tourism taxes. These grants, depending upon the project, cover up to 97.5 percent of capital improvement costs.

Do businesses on the airport pay real estate taxes?

Section 196.012(6) of Florida state statutes exempt most aviation businesses on airport property providing goods and/or services to the aviation public from paying ad valorem taxes in order to promote air commerce throughout the state. The statute also makes similar provisions to other public venues, such as ports and marinas, where private businesses lease publically-owned property to offer goods and services to the public. A determination of the tax status of any business is made by the Sarasota County Tax Collector. The City of Venice is not involved in this process.

Aviation and non-aviation businesses located on airport property paid approximately \$106,000 in ad valorem taxes in 2010. In addition, all businesses located on airport property are subject to sales tax.

What does having an airport like VNC contribute to the City of Venice?

VNC offers many benefits to Venice and surrounding communities. Dr. Fred H. Albee used the original municipal airport (see History of the Aviation in Venice) for his air ambulance service to transport patients to the Florida Medical Center, which also contributed to the early development and economic health of the city. That impact continues today as several entities that provide critical healthcare, law enforcement and fire fighting service, operate from VNC. In addition, the airport helps meet the demand for aviation facilities and services in the area, provides convenient access to the City on the Gulf and adds jobs to the community

The state of Florida completed an Aviation Economic Impact Study in 2010. VNC was estimated to have a positive regional economic impact of around \$80 million, but those figures were based in part on an estimated traffic count of 172,000 annual takeoffs and landings that we know today are much lower at about 60,000, determined by the implementation of the aircraft traffic counting system in March 2009.

However, an on-airport aviation business association conducted a study at the end of 2007 that determined aviation businesses generated roughly \$19 million in gross revenues and employed nearly 100 full time employees with a payroll of about \$3.6 million. At this time, the study is being updated to reflect the current economic climate, but it is clear that VNC has a substantial economic impact on the city and its surrounding area.

By its nature, airport property preserves open space. Lake Venice Golf Course and its natural Red Lake are examples of open land used for human recreation and wildlife preservation.

How do I learn more about VNC?

If you have questions or would like to visit VNC, please contact the Airport Administration Office at (941) 486-2711 or stop by 150 E. Airport Ave., Venice, FL 34285. The airport staff would appreciate the opportunity to meet you and show what VNC has to offer. Airport staff is also available to speak to your homeowners' association, professional organization or civic group upon request.