

Shelley LaRose-Arken

Commissioner of Aviation and Transportation
for LI MacArthur Airport and Bayport Aerodrome

MAKING THE MOST OF LI MACARTHUR AIRPORT



Pass her in the terminal and you may mistake her for a seasoned flight attendant: Friendly and knowledgeable. Polished and professional. Confident and competent. But with a closer look, you'll soon discover that Shelley LaRose-Arken is actually the woman in charge at MacArthur, firmly planted in the pilot's seat, both literally and figuratively.

Sometimes describing the airport as "a city unto itself," it occurred to me that Shelley's role as Commissioner of Aviation and Transportation for LI MacArthur Airport and Bayport Aerodrome could easily be re-titled the "Mayor of MacArthur." Like most mayors, she oversees daily operations across her "district" which encompasses 1300 acres plus the responsibility for another 399 acres which house the historic Bayport Aerodrome (for more about the Aerodrome, be sure to see page 28). Shelley must manage human resources and public relations while supervising a full-time staff of 83, including fire rescue and law enforcement personnel, an engineering department plus maintenance and custodial crews.

She, too, is ultimately responsible for marketing and business development, working hard to attract both private business and major airline carriers to MacArthur. The Commissioner manages all this while walking among the 6,000+ additional "residents" who inhabit her domain daily: a mixture of TSA agents, air traffic control and other public/private airline employees, plus the thousands of travelers who pass through each week. This role, regardless of title, demands someone be well-grounded, while keeping at least part of their head "in the clouds." It's a position perfectly suited for Shelley LaRose-Arken.

EARNING HER WINGS

Airport management may seem like an unusual career path especially for Shelley who, as a teenager, had planned to become an accountant until realizing she "preferred people over numbers!" This epiphany prompted her to take a year off and consider her options before heading to college, allowing her to spend more time with her family, including her stepfather—a licensed pilot. Unknowingly, this "gap year" would set Shelley on a new course toward a career in aviation (which would, ironically, lead to management positions that required her to utilize those accounting skills for business and budgetary purposes!)

Inspired by her stepfather—and perhaps somewhat by the Stevie Nicks albums she would listen to repeatedly—this "white winged dove" took to the skies and learned to fly. Not only did Shelley earn her single-engine pilot's license, but she went on to achieve a commercial-instrument rating and multi-engine license.

Echoes of Stevie Nicks' anthem "Go Your Own Way" could be the soundtrack for Shelley's decision to enroll at Florida Institute of Technology to study aviation management and flight technology, a field where the ratio of women to men was only 1:7. "Girl Power" may not have been a social media hashtag at the time, but today, the dynamic duo of Shelley LaRose-Arken and Islip Town Supervisor Angie Carpenter (who just "looooves" the airport, according to Shelley) speaks volumes about the rise and success of women in both business and politics. So I found it fitting that Shelley's interview was coincidentally conducted on the holiday recognized as "International Day of the Girl!"

The "groundwork" for Shelley's airport experience began with an internship at the Spirit of St. Louis Airport near her home in Kansas City. She then spent the following three years working in noise abatement at Cincinnati/N. Kentucky International Airport before heading to New York's Westchester County Airport.

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Choosing to stay in New York, Shelley then accepted a position as Assistant Manager at Republic Airport in 1999, where she would later meet her husband (a pilot for American Airlines). She would remain at Republic for a total of 18 years, with the last ten being under her full direction as Airport Manager.

The knowledge and experience Shelley gained at Republic made her the perfect choice to take the lead at MacArthur. Working with the Town of Islip and Supervisor Carpenter, Shelley is now helping define and execute a new strategic vision for MacArthur Airport.

SECOND TO NONE

Although Long Island MacArthur Airport (ISP) is what's known as a "secondary" regional airport, it was recently recognized as the #1 Fastest Growing Domestic Airport in the country, based on seat availability. That's a big deal. In less than five years (with Shelley in charge for the last two and a half) MacArthur has increased the number of seats sold by more than 50%, growing from 1 million in 2013 to over 1.6 million in 2018. And they don't plan on stopping there. Without requiring any further runway expansion, the existing three runways (and two helipads) are able to accommodate more than double the number of operations they offer (currently 160,000 per year but have capacity for 270,000 operations). That's not to say that they don't need to continue to upgrade and enhance the airport grounds, runways, terminals and other facilities, but they have a plan for that too.

Oversight of the Commissioner and the airport is provided by Islip's Town Board who approves programs and budgets for the facility. MacArthur (which receives NO local taxpayer funding) has a \$16 million/year budget and has operated at a profit for the last three years. They also boast a current surplus of over \$4 million. Few other government-owned facilities can claim such success.

continued on page 21

LI MacArthur Airport
Islip, New York



The majority of the funding (about 90%) for LI MacArthur Airport comes from the federal government through the Airport Capital Improvement Program with the rest covered by Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) and state aviation funding. MacArthur then produces additional income from the airline carriers, private/general aviation leases and other on-site businesses, as well as fees for related services they offer (fuel, catering, etc.). Currently, MacArthur is home to four domestic carriers (American, Southwest, Frontier and Elite) who together offer non-stop flights to 11 popular destinations with international connections to most anywhere in the world.

The airport's profits and surplus are used to fund ongoing capital improvements such as the brand-new \$18 million state-of-the-art Fire Rescue Building, completed in July of 2018 which employed four local contractors and multiple subcontractors. As we speak, low-bidder and LICA member Intercounty Paving Associates (IPA) was in the process of a \$16 million rehabilitation of Runway 6/24 which includes new lighting and the removal and reconstruction of pavement for the 7,000+ ft long x 150 ft wide runway. Project requirements demand that there be no interruption of air carrier service, so all work must be performed in small sections between the hours of 11:30 pm and 6:00 am. This project alone has created 100 temporary construction jobs and is slotted for completion in the fall of 2019. Shelley was proud to point out that all airport capital projects are bid through a competitive procurement process and all notices are posted on both the airport (www.macarthurairport.com) and the Town of Islip's (www.townofislip-ny.gov) website.

DESTINATION: 2022

According to Shelley, Supervisor Angie Carpenter has always "had a vision" for MacArthur. She clearly understands that ISP is one of the Town's most valuable assets and sees enormous untapped potential. Back in 2012, DOT estimated that MacArthur generated over \$600 million in economic activity for the region and that number is sure to have multiplied since.

Last year, the airport launched a new ad campaign "Stress Less. Pay Less.," designed to raise MacArthur's profile. Aimed specifically at Nassau/Suffolk residents, the campaign promotes the ease of flying in/out of a small local airport while enjoying cheaper fares offered to many destinations. And this year, after much discussion and market research, they have outlined an ambitious new three-year plan (set to start in 2019) entitled "Destination: 2022."

LONG ISLAND
Stress less. Pay less.
11 nonstop cities from ISP. Unlimited Connections.
 American Airlines • **elite** • **FRONTIER** • Southwest
FlyMacArthur.com

continued on next page



The focus of Destination: 2022 will be to recruit other domestic air carriers who can provide additional point-to-point service options at competitive fares. With a strong belief that new air carriers are seeking secondary market airports to offer their customers better alternatives, higher levels of customer service and innovation, both Shelley and the Supervisor think this is the opportunity to grow MacArthur into a premiere regional airport. The program's proposed \$85 million capital improvement plan is sure to set them apart from the competition, while simultaneously helping the local economy (and heavy construction industry).

In addition to mechanical, electrical and plumbing upgrades and a new transportation facility, the proposed capital plan includes terminal enhancements to update the aesthetics and rehabilitate the west concourse area with new gates, a business center, recharging stations and even a service dog relief area (pets are customers too...). Then there's the \$2 million co-op investment with Suffolk County and the LIRR to try and make the "train to the plane" a reality and plans for two more corporate hangars for private development.

AIMING HIGH

With a \$1 billion omnibus aviation bill recently passed in Washington DC, MacArthur is hoping to check more items off their "wish list" by applying for grants to fund additional improvements such as a new baggage claim area (\$11 million) and rebuilding the west concourse (\$53 million).

Regional activities outside the airport also present growth opportunities. According to Shelley, ISP has already seen a slight uptick in business due to the major renovations going on at LaGuardia (LGA). And, although they have no specific involvement with the Ronkonkoma Hub project, they are confident that it too will be beneficial. Then there's the East Side Access project which, once completed, Shelley believes could be a proverbial game-changer for MacArthur by providing more non-stop service between New York City and Ronkonkoma Station.

But despite what goes on outside her earthly domain, it appears that MacArthur Airport, under the direction of "Mayor" Shelley LaRose-Arken, is most definitely "cleared and ready for takeoff".



Photos (left): A Southwest Airlines jet at LI MacArthur Airport. (Top to bottom): ISP main terminal; new fire rescue building; airport maintenance equipment; Commissioner Shelley LaRose-Arken and Town of Islip Supervisor Angie Carpenter.

Runway Ramblings

with Commissioner
Shelley LaRose-Arken



Q. Window, aisle or middle seat?

A. I'm a window girl.

Q. Chips, pretzels or cookies?

A. Cookies for sure.

Q. Favorite flight destination?

A. Anywhere in the Caribbean.

Q. Most memorable flight experience?

A. Earning my pilot's license, I had to do an 8.5 hour cross country flight. Five student pilots took off at the same time. I was the only one to make it back the same day. The other four followed each other, taking the wrong route and had to finish the next day. I was proud that I stuck to my guns, followed my instincts and flew the right course correctly on my own.

Q. Scariest airport or airline experience?

A. It was actually on the ground, during a fire rescue training course. I had to go in a simulator, then also try to control a fire hose which lifted me and another participant off the ground. Seriously scary. I have an enormous respect for what firefighters do...

Q. Best advice for anyone who's afraid to fly?

A. Take flying lessons. Sounds crazy but the real fear is often about relinquishing control-not flying!

Q. Worst weather condition for airports? Wind, fog, rain, snow?

A. Snow and ice for sure. White-out conditions, clearing runways, etc. The pressure to get the airport re-opened.

Q. Being pilots, do you and your husband ever "back seat drive" when flying as passengers?

A. Sure, I have to admit we occasionally "critique" other pilots!

Q. Best suggestions to manage long flights?

A. Drink plenty of water, elevate your feet and sleep immediately so you're ready to go when you arrive at your destination.

Q. Any memorable passenger story or airport incident?

A. A child with a special disability was on a flight and left their toy on the plane, which was devastating for that child. When the parents called to ask about it, we discovered it had somehow been thrown out. Our dedicated administrative, custodial and law enforcement staff immediately began "dumpster diving" until they found the toy, which we then promptly returned to the family!

Q. Best part of flying from MacArthur? Easy parking/quick commute/efficient security lines?

A. All of the above! Plus, as of September 27th this year, FREE WIFI for all!

