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FLEXIBILITY ADAPTABILITY CREATIVITY IMAGINATION

The Essential Traits for Success in Today's Aviation Industry

BY ADRIENNE SRAVER AND ANDREW CUSHMAN

Rendering of the new Residence Inn that will open mid-2020 as the first extended-stay hotel at John Glenn Columbus International Airport.

As airports rapidly ascend in economic, societal and geographic importance, owners struggle to keep aging facilities on track with the state-of-the-art, customer-friendly facilities passengers and carriers demand. Compounded by the high costs, disruptions and inconveniences associated with new construction, many owners find themselves searching for solutions.

As such, airports and their partners must provide innovative, efficient and effective solutions to maximize current facilities.

Located minutes from downtown Columbus, Ohio, John Glenn Columbus International (CMH) achieved a record of more than 8 million passengers in 2018. The addition of at least three new routes confirmed for 2019 — to Seattle, San Francisco and Salt Lake City — has led to creative and inventive solutions to handle this growth.



Shannetta Griffin

“The days of an airport creating a 20-year master plan are a thing of the past,” said Shannetta Griffin, chief development officer for the

Columbus Regional Airport Authority (CRAA). With more than 30 years of aviation experience, Griffin oversees the division that manages the planning, design and construction of all facilities at CMH.

Griffin stated, “What’s driving imagination, creativity and adaptability is customer satisfaction. An airport is a customer service facility. We have to consider every aspect of the airport from the passenger and air carrier standpoint and then deliver on those needs and expectations. All of this reverts back to flexibility and adaptability.”

With the help of Hill International, Inc., which has served the CRAA as construction management advisors on more than \$100 million in projects, CMH has become an industry standard for upgrading and modernizing its core facilities to meet the



Airport renovations included incorporating elements that reflected the local community, such as this atrium mosaic with Columbus images, to enhance the passenger experience.



Checkpoints were expanded to serve the growing number of passengers within the current terminal that opened in the 1950s.

demands of today’s air travel industry — serving both passengers and carriers.

“We envision ourselves as a true extension of the CMH staff, priding ourselves on understanding their vision and goals,” said Hill Senior Project Manager Adrienne Sraver. “It’s more than just getting an assignment and carrying it out. Our partnership stresses open communication and dialogue, sharing different ideas and best practices to achieve optimum results on time and under budget. That facilitation of information back and forth is a must in the aviation industry in the 21st century.”

The practical adjustments and renovations addressed at CMH’s core facility include security checkpoints, hold rooms, ticketing lobbies, escalator and elevator upgrades. CMH also has invested in curbside and façade-related improvements, including energy-efficient, retrofitted light fixtures.

In addition, CMH has utilized space evaluations to provide for additional restrooms, including family-designated facilities, as well as to allow for more TSA security checkpoint lanes, leading to shorter wait times.

“We are looking at everything,” Griffin said. “We are looking at water reuse, reducing our carbon footprint, and energy reform and energy reuse. How do we handle

waste, and what new technology is out there that we can be adapting?”

CMH also has undergone curbside improvements, including upgrading the existing vestibules, and providing improved convenience and efficiency for ticketing and baggage claim operations. Meanwhile, the Hill team supported the CRAA to expedite delivery of the ticket lobby modernization. In addition, CMH is currently undergoing elevator and escalator renovations. An entire tower of escalators has been shut down for modernization as the facility continues investing in its infrastructure. The CRAA specifically has emphasized maintaining the passenger experience during construction, and Hill and the project team have supported this mandate through finished temporary walls and wayfinding signage, along with conducting work during evening shifts to minimize impacts on customers.

“We are looking at operational efficiency across the organization,” Griffin said. “We are looking at things we can streamline and improve work processes around. We’re making sure we are using the right people to do the right jobs. This all helps us with flexibility and adaptability. If we have to change things, we can be ready for it. Communication with the right people getting the right information is crucial.”

According to Sraver, Hill is already responding to this need. “CMH has a new CEO, CDO, and new board members, all coming on in the last year, and there has been a focus on project reporting and information that executives need exposure to, such as earned value on projects and potential risk items. Hill has helped create forms and adapted our management style to ensure communication is fluid to executives. Information is only good if the people using it understand it,” she said.

Griffin agreed. “We are learning about our customers every day,” she said. “We have to be more creative and imaginative with our facilities, because we know an airport is just not about getting to the plane. This is not simply a building, it is a community space, a gathering place. It is for sitting and talking, eating, shopping, relaxing. In airports, there are workout spaces, personal hygiene stations. For kids, it is a place to play and have fun. We have to consider what our common spaces look like, what amenities we offer.”

Griffin stressed that technology is leading airports to uncharted territory. “We’re at a point where you can get from the curbside, check your bag, and get your ticket all without talking to a single person,” she said. “Here’s another example, what if you have a flight delay? You need to serve those customers. Especially those with kids. They need things to do. And what do kids do nowadays? They’re on touchscreens. Large-scale, interactive touchscreens are needed. These technologies and advancements are now mandatory.”

Also mandatory, Griffin said, is understanding an airport’s importance to the local and regional community. CMH is a powerful economic engine in Ohio,

contributing more than 33,360 jobs, \$1.7 billion in annual payroll, and nearly \$5.3 billion in annual economic activity. The immediate future at CMH includes adding an extended-stay Residence Inn by Marriott hotel on site, as well as the spring groundbreaking of a new consolidated rental car facility, which, Griffin said, “will be built in phases to address the need around parking capacity and rental cars. But since we know the landscape is always changing, we are building in phases to adjust and adapt as needed moving forward. That’s just the way of the industry right now.”

Citing significant growth at CMH’s sister facility Rickenbacker International, Griffin said, “Our economic impact has skyrocketed. We’re working with our visitor’s bureau and our convention partners, as well as our community. We’re always looking at how we provide additional value to the airport and community. We need to be a forward thinker.

“When you have a \$50 million capital program, those are direct and indirect jobs. Of course, the airport is a part of the economic engine, but it is not just at the airport: it’s also the indirect impact

at grocery stores, cleaners, and all the materials purchased from supply companies. We are changing lives. Companies that used to be small are now medium-sized. Firms that were sub-consultants are now primes, and they’re able to hire more people. All of us are very proud of being that big of a driver.” 

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