YQQ reports 2013 passenger numbers

The Comox Valley Airport served 313,186 passengers in 2013. While this represents a 4.5 per cent drop from the previous year, the airport continues to serve more passengers than it did prior to the economic downturn.

“We are seeing our numbers begin to stabilize after a decade of spikes and dips,” explained CEO Fred Bigelow. “Following our terminal expansion we experienced a period of significant growth, then a drop during the economic downturn, followed by market recovery, more growth and now what we think will be a period of stabilization.”

According to Bigelow, the loss of two Air Transat routes to Cancun and Puerto Vallarta in 2012 was the greatest contributing factor to the drop in passenger numbers for the calendar year. The airport continues to work towards obtaining a new sunspot route to fill the capacity left by Air Transat. In the longer term its goal is to obtain a direct service to a hub airport in the United States that will allow passengers to access connecting services to U.S. destinations on the same ticket.

“While we are confident that our passenger numbers will remain healthy, and we continue to find ourselves in a positive financial situation with strong net revenues, we also know that people in this community would appreciate additional air service options,” he concluded.
Message from the CEO

We entered into 2014 on the heels of a busy holiday travel season. With January now almost behind us, many of us are working on our own personal goals for the New Year. Here at YQQ we are thinking about the Commission’s priorities as we settle into 2014.

As a first step, we are getting to work on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. This involves taking a good hard look at our spending habits, as well as setting revenue targets based on our passenger predictions. In particular, we will be fine tuning our capital plan to make sure that this facility meets the future needs of our passengers, carriers, and the community as a whole.

Aside from strong financial performance, YQQ had some other notable highlights in 2013:

Spring - February marked the tenth anniversary of the municipal referendum vote that made the construction of the Comox Valley Airport terminal building possible. Over 17,000 votes were cast in the referendum and an overwhelming 87.5 per cent of municipal taxpayers voted in favour of providing a $4 million capital grant to the Comox Valley Airport Commission to help construct a new airport terminal.

Summer - After an eight-year hiatus, the Comox Air Show returned to the Valley in August. Thanks to outstanding cooperation with 19 Wing Comox, and the amazing support of our partners and volunteers, we maintained all our scheduled service throughout the day, and some of passengers got a close up look at the performers on the “hot ramp!”

Fall/Winter - YQQ was pleased to welcome Budget Car and Truck Rental back to the airport late this year after a three year absence. Aside from increasing airport revenues, having a third rental agency at the airport is a real improvement for our customers – both in terms of choice and convenience.

We closed 2013 with a passenger count of 313,186 passengers. While this represents a 4.5 per cent drop from the previous year, we are positive about the fact that the airport continues to serve more passengers than it did prior to the economic downturn. We believe we are entering into a period of stabilization after a decade of spikes and dips and we expect our passenger numbers will stay fairly flat over the next few years, until we are able to add more air service - a priority that continues for the coming year.

Sincerely,

Fred Bigelow
Chief Executive Officer
Comox Valley Airport
Passengers take advantage of direct flights to Mexico

Passengers are escaping by the plane load to enjoy fun, sun and sand in Mexico, with weekly direct flights to Puerto Vallarta from YQQ.

“Once again we are pleased to offer a direct flight to Puerto Vallarta from November through April,” said Comox Valley Airport CEO, Fred Bigelow. “These flights are so convenient, saving our passengers time and money while helping to alleviate additional stress associated with having to travel to another airport to catch a flight.”

“The flight takes approximately five hours,” explained Bigelow. “To reach the same destination on the same day, starting from YVR, would add an additional five hours travel time, plus an overnight stay in a hotel before and after the trip due to ferry schedules. That is a huge savings in terms of time, money and hassle.”

The Comox Valley Airport is hopeful travelers will recognize the benefits of travelling direct from YQQ this winter. To promote the Puerto Vallarta route, the airport sponsored the Jet Away to Puerto Vallarta contest in partnership with JetFM and several local businesses. Lucky JetFM listener Sandi Phye won a fabulous all inclusive vacation for two from YQQ to Puerto Vallarta.

“We were pleased to partner with local businesses to offer this amazing opportunity for our passengers to win a free trip,” said Bigelow. “The Comox Valley Airport has been offering seasonal service to Mexico since 2004. We want to keep this route thriving in the hopes of attracting additional sunspot destinations to our airport.”

On the Fly Café staff pose with Jet FM’s Jay Hadden at the Fiesta celebration.
Northern Vancouver Island artists display their unique impressions of coastal living at YQQ

Fourteen talented local artists now have their work on display at the Comox Valley Airport. YQQ’s Art and Culture Program opened its 2013/14 exhibition Coastal Explorations—Celebrating Island Living on November 21. Twenty exceptional pieces of work representing the artists’ views of northern Vancouver Island will be available to the public until May 1, 2014.

“All work presented in this year’s display celebrates island living through representations of the people, places, employment opportunities and natural environment of this region,” said Jen Alton of the Comox Valley Community Arts Council. “We were absolutely thrilled with the high caliber of submissions we received for this exhibition. We have a really interesting variety of work on display this year.”

The exhibition features photography, sculpture, painting and textiles by artists Brian Argyle, Bert Badey, Lisa Cross, Bill Kerr, Sandra Lamb, Brian Latta, Marsha Mackinnon, Hans Peter Meyer, Uli Ostermann, Marilyn Peeters, Heimke Webb and Grace Wolff. For the first time, the YQQ Art and Culture Program is pleased to feature a unique fabric art installation by Althea White, as well as a soapstone carving by Ron Moffat.

“This exhibition is an excellent way to connect our passengers with the northern Vancouver Island cultural community and provide a truly enhanced experience at our airport,” explained YQQ CEO, Fred Bigelow. “We are proud to work with the Comox Valley Community Arts Council on this highly successful public art program, which is now entering into its third year.”

The Comox Valley Airport Art and Culture Program, a partnership between YQQ and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, is intended to showcase the rich artistic tradition of northern Vancouver Island by presenting an annual public art exhibition for YQQ passengers and the community. A call for submissions is issued each spring and artwork is selected by a jury made up of representatives from the airport and the Arts Council.

More information about this program, the featured artists and their work on display at the Comox Valley Airport can be found on www.comoxairport.com under Airport Services/Art and Culture Program. For information about how to get involved in YQQ’s Art and Culture program and other community arts projects, visit www.comoxvalleyarts.com.

Back: Bert Badey, Jennifer Alton, Hans Peter Meyer, Heimke Webb, Sandra Lamb, Althea White, Ron Moffat
Front: Bill Kerr, Grace Wolff, Lisa Cross, Marilyn Peeters, Uli Ostermann, Brian Latta
Artwork: Noon by Grace Wolff, Ocean Songs by Marilyn Peeters and Foggy Morning at Comox Fisherman’s Wharf by Marsha Mackinnon
BC Ferries offers alternative service from YQQ

As the BC Ferries Powell River and Comox terminals receive upgrades, alternative arrangements have been made to transport ferry passengers through the Comox Valley Airport.

A flight service has been set up between Powell River and Comox with Pacific Coastal Airlines. The service operates from Monday to Friday starting on January 12 until February 7.

Darin Guenette, BC Ferries Manager of Public Affairs explained to local news outlets last month that the service is “primarily for medical appointments,” adding that the flights are not usually completely booked and often there is room for others on a first-come, first-served basis.

Passengers wishing to utilize the flight must make a reservation with BC Ferries. Tickets for the flights cost the same as a foot passenger fare on the ferries. Passengers on the flights will have ground shuttle service from YQQ to Campbell River, Courtenay and Comox.

For reservations or more information phone: 1-888-BC-Ferry (1-888-223-3779).

YQQ welcomes Budget Car and Truck Rentals

A warm welcome to Budget Car and Truck Rentals from everyone at the Comox Valley Airport. The agency took up residence in the terminal building on December 1. Having a third rental agency on site at the airport will create more choice for passengers and eliminate the need to shuttle Budget customers off site.

To book a car rental visit Budget’s website at: http://www.bcbudget.com or phone toll-free at 1-888-368-7368.
Airport unveils 2014 print ad campaign

The airport has launched its latest print advertisements targeted at inbound passengers. The two advertisements depict images of a surfer in Tofino and a skier on Mount Washington and are intended to lure those passengers who are seeking outdoor adventure to start their journey at the Comox Valley Airport.

“Our 2014 print advertising campaign focuses on the proximity of the airport to two top tourist destinations in our catchment area - with ads targeting both winter and summer travellers,” explained Christianne Wile, YQQ’s Manager of Marketing and Public Communications. “These ads use beautiful imagery and visual tag lines to draw the reader’s attention.”

Wile says the print campaign is just one piece of YQQ’s strategic marketing plan, which also includes television, outdoor, radio and online advertising.

Generosity abound at YQQ during the holiday season

Last month the Comox Valley Airport raised more than $1,000 for the Comox Valley Food Bank and donated four large hampers (more than 360 food, toiletries and gift items) plus $200 cash to the Christmas Spirit Hamper Program. A special thanks to Central Mountain Air, On the Fly Café and Mid Island Gifts, all of which donated gifts and prizes to the Food Bank fundraiser. Thanks also to National Car and Truck Rental for providing transportation to deliver the food hampers.

Of course the generosity of the YQQ tenants, staff and volunteers, through their donations of hamper items, cash and their own time, made both of these fundraising efforts a huge success.

From left to right: Andrea (On the Fly Café), Mark and Judy (Comox Valley Food Bank), Diane (Central Mountain Air), Diane (Mid Island Gifts) and Fred (Comox Valley Airport Commission) pose for a photo at the Comox Valley Food Bank “Thanks a Latte” fundraising event.
WinterBites Festival a unique Valley experience

YQQ is the proud sponsor of a new festival in the Comox Valley that promises to embrace winter through music and fun sporting events at various venues throughout the Valley.

The festival kicked off on January 16 for 16 days, combining concerts, an outdoor skating rink, ski package deals and hockey jamborees.

WinterBites is intended to help drive awareness, visitation and economic activity in the region, especially during the shoulder season. Driving passenger numbers during non-peak months is also a goal of YQQ, so the event is a natural fit for a partnership with the airport explains CEO Fred Bigelow.

“January tends to be a slower month for us in terms of passenger traffic, so helping an event like this come to fruition will hopefully assist in bringing more people into the Valley, some of whom may use the airport,” said Bigelow.

“WinterBites is a great example of what partnerships can create,” Comox Valley Economic Development Society Executive Director John Watson explained last month at Courtenay Council.

The musical lineup organized by Vancouver Island MusicFest included Barney Bentall, the Grapes of Wrath, the Odds and Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac, with performances at the Westerly Hotel, Crown Isle, the Filberg Centre and Native Sons Hall.

Throughout the course of the festival, Mount Washington offered discounts on lift tickets. Simms Park was a designated ‘fun zone’ with outdoor skating on a synthetic ice rink created by BH Skating International. The festival was anchored by three hockey tournaments hosted by Comox Valley Minor Hockey.
YQQ security screener recognized

Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA) CEO Angus Watt visited YQQ in January and presented a token of appreciation to Lead Screener John Ackerman in recognition of his dedication, professionalism, attention to duty and long standing commitment to excellence.

Meet our new Board Member

Fred Bates - Member at large

Born and raised in the Comox Valley, Fred spent 30 years with the British Columbia Ambulance service, including serving as Executive Director for the province. He was inducted in to the St. John’s order of Canada in 1991, the same year he returned to Cumberland and became involved in local politics. Fred served on Cumberland Council for six years and then as Mayor of Cumberland for nine years. During that time he was elected as the Chair of both the Regional Hospital District and the Comox Valley Regional District. Fred received the Queens Diamond Jubilee medal in 2012 for his work in local government and promoting stronger economic relations with central Vancouver Island and China. He is currently Vice President of the Courtenay and district Fish and Game Protective Association, as well as a director on the Comox Valley Community Foundation Board and the local branch of St. John’s Ambulance.