

# WEEKEND WAVE

11-04-16



## Friday Economic Roundup

### Airport welcomes Frontier Airlines

By ANNE EASKER Staff Writer Charlotte Sun

Jeannie Onasch planned to drive 20 hours by herself to see her grandsons near Philadelphia, until she got an email advertising a \$57 flight on Frontier Airlines out of Punta Gorda.

"I thought, 'Nah, that's just for the club,' - but no, it's for real," she said.

Onasch flew out Monday morning on Frontier's inaugural flight to Trenton, New Jersey, with a round-trip cost under \$100, a price she said was unbeatable. The low-cost airline began service at Punta Gorda Airport on Sunday night.

On Monday morning, airport officials held a welcoming event, offering "Welcome to Punta Gorda" care packages to 96 passengers arriving from New Jersey, followed by a ribbon-cutting for the departing flight.

The care packages contained donations from local businesses, including sunscreen, Chapstick, a travel pack of Band-aids, neck wallets, a travel brush/compact, a baking spatula, area guides, and an assortment of discount cards and coupons.

"One guy said, 'I didn't get this kind of welcome in New Jersey,'" said Executive Assistant Jennifer Smith. "You could tell they felt really VIP."

Executive Director James Parish said the Visitors' Bureau estimated the airport's

economic impact at \$9.5 million last year. He expects that number to go up 20 percent with the addition of Frontier.

"It's an exciting time for the airport," said Airport Authority Commissioner James Herston, who attended the event with fellow Authority Commissioners Paul Andrews, Pam Seay and Rob Hancik. "There will be more to come."

"We're looking forward to the great opportunities Frontier is bringing to us in Punta Gorda," Seay said. "With new destinations, we have the opportunity for folks to go places they couldn't go before."

Frontier's Stations Regional Manager Darrin Hughes said the airline may add more destinations next season.

"We're thrilled to bring low fares down right to Punta Gorda Airport, and we're looking forward to a long relationship with the Punta Gorda community," Hughes said. "So many people winter here, it's nice for them to be able to fly home instead of drive to a much larger airport to get there."

Frontier is flying now to both Trenton and Philadelphia and will begin flights to Chicago on Nov. 6.

## Frontier Airlines takes off in Punta Gorda

By Maggie Menderski Retail Reporter Sarasota Herald-Tribune

PUNTA GORDA - Frontier Airlines' new flights into Punta Gorda cut travel time to the airport in half for Tony and Beryl Rotunno.

The new nonstop service to Philadelphia, Chicago O'Hare and Trenton, New Jersey, is rolling out this week and adding a second low-cost carrier to the Allegiant Air-dominated Punta Gorda Airport. The Rotunnos, a New Jersey-based couple, bought a second home in Port Charlotte two years ago and have been flying into Tampa International Airport or Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers about once a month ever since.

The airfare, typically, determines how they fly, Tony Rotuno said, but if the fares are comparable, the flights between Trenton and Punta Gorda shortens the hour or two-hour hike to the airport to about 30 minutes.

"This is very convenient," Rotunno said. "I think it's great that Allegiant now has competition for this airport."

Punta Gorda Airport, which didn't even have commercial service a decade ago, has boomed in recent years with more than 30 percent annual growth. James Parish, the airport's president and CEO, welcomed more than a million passengers for the first time. Punta Gorda Airport, which just underwent a 45,000-square-foot expansion, has plenty of room to grow, too. Today, the space is only operating at 75 percent capacity.

This could just be the beginning for Frontier in Charlotte County, said Darrin Hughes, regional manager for Frontier.

"I would anticipate growth here," Hughes said. "There's plenty of room for us to grow, and other carriers to grow because this airport has staged itself to grow."

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