

Aviation Executives To Meet in Van Nuys On Airport Issues

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By Mark R. Madler

How general aviation airports can get the message out to the public of their benefits to a community is among the topics for discussion next month at an American Association of Airport Executives conference.

The association brings its third annual look at issues facing general aviation to the Van Nuys Airport from May 7 to 9.

After holding the event in Colorado and Florida in previous years, the association wanted to bring it to the West Coast. As the world's busiest general aviation airport, Van Nuys was the appropriate site, said Alex Gertsen, director of regulatory affairs for the AAAE.

"When we reached out to LAWA (Los Angeles World Airports), without any hesitation they agreed to host," Gertsen said.

The conference kicks off with a private screening of "One Six Right," a documentary from Chatsworth filmmaker Brian Terwilliger mixing the history of the Valley airfield with the love of flying. Two days of panels, a visit to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, an evening reception, and tours of the Van Nuys Airport will follow.

Clay Lacy, one of the original air charter operators at the airport, gives the keynote address on May 8.

The business of running an airport gets more complicated every year and the conference lets operators know what common issues face airports, said Selena Birk, manager of Van Nuys.

"It is important to share expertise and successes and failures so we can be better at addressing those common issues," said Birk, who attended last year's conference in Florida.

Birk will make an opening comment on the first day. Diana Sanchez, director of public and community relations, will take part in a panel discussion about how general aviation airports work with the media and community in providing information.

Gertsen works with a conference committee to draw up the agenda of industry panels. Some, like the state of general aviation roundtable, are recurring. New this year are the panels on community and public relations.

"General aviation airports are underappreciated; a lot of times it is important to emphasize their benefits," Gertsen said.

At Van Nuys, the airport has done public outreach on noise issues and works with the Los Angeles Unified School District to promote aviation and aerospace careers and stress the importance of science and math, Birk said.

The conference also includes panels on minimizing the environmental impact of general aviation; best industry practices; and use of technology in general aviation.

For more information visit www.GAIssuesConference.com.