

# RUNWAY *Café*

## HIGH FLYING FARE

BY SARAH Z. CORDELL

**T**he story of the Runway Café, the new restaurant scheduled to open this month at the Greenville Downtown Airport, actually began last year in Atlanta.

When Lara Kaufman moved to Greenville last August, the mother of two began looking for a set-up similar to that of the Downwinds restaurant at the DeKalb Peachtree Airport in Atlanta. There, plane watchers can enjoy a great view of the planes landing and leaving while eating a good meal, and when kids get bored of watching the planes, they can while away the time on the playground nearby.

Kaufman began looking around the Greenville area, but she didn't find what she was looking for. She did, however, find someone interested in the concept – Joe Frasher, Airport Director for the Greenville Downtown Airport.

"We'd been wanting a restaurant out here for quite some time," Frasher said – quite some time being close to 20 years!

The Greenville Downtown Airport, located between South Pleasantburg Drive and Haywood Road, is the busiest general aviation airport in South Carolina. More than 25 related businesses launch from the airport, which annually adds more than \$35 million to the Upstate's economy. Plane enthusiasts routinely line the roads to catch a glimpse of the planes as they take off and land. But since security has tightened in recent years, plane-watching just isn't as easy as it used to be. A restaurant that's open to the public is a win-win for everyone.

"It's good for the airport," Frasher said, "It makes your airport a destination."

So the Greenville Downtown Airport asked Kaufman, now Public Relations Director, to bring a public restaurant to the airport.

At the same time, Mike Bliss was losing his café location in The Open Book, an independent bookstore located off South Pleasantburg Drive that closed earlier this year.



Co-owners Lem Winesett and Mike Bliss. Photograph by Nill Silver Photography

“Fortunately, this opportunity came about,” said Bliss, who has 16 years in the restaurant business.

“It was kind of fluky,” said Kaufman. “We were just trying to get the word out.”

A customer of the Open Book’s Palmetto Bean Café (which also has a location in the main branch of the Greenville Library) heard about search for a restaurant for the downtown airport and told Bliss about it.

Within two weeks of making the connection, Bliss was chosen for the restaurant and work began on the Runway Café.

The café, which is located in a former flight-school facility, will include more than 80 seats inside and 60 additional seats outside. Eventually, the café will feature close to 200 outdoor seats.

“We’re going to hope for a lot of good weather,” Bliss said.

The two walls facing the runway will be solid glass to afford indoor diners a great view of the airport traffic. In addition to being convenient for non-aviators, the restaurant will feature a pilots’ lounge, with convenient parking for aircraft located right in front!

Runway Café will be open for lunch and dinner six days a week and will be open for lunch on Sundays. The menu will be value-oriented, ranging from \$6-7 for lunch and \$14-16 for dinner. Small plates will be available as well.

“We lean toward healthy foods,” Bliss said, when describing the menu.

In addition to the indoor and outdoor seating areas, the Runway Café also offers a 3,000-square-foot hanger that will be available for public functions.

The Greenville Downtown Airport also has more plans in the works. The airport is looking for a partner to develop land adjacent to the restaurant into a park. According to Kaufman, the area could feature an all-ages park as well as a walking trail.

“We want something where people can just relax and hang out,” Kaufman said. “It’s going to be a good kids location.”

Frasher agreed, saying that while the airport is now focusing on getting Runway Café in the air (so to speak), they would like to see a park area down the road.

“We want it to work in harmony (with the restaurant),” Frasher said.

The Café will be located at the crossing of the airport’s two runways (21 Airport Road Extension).

A firm date for the grand opening has not yet been set, but you can keep up with all the Runway Café news by becoming a fan of their Facebook page (search Runway Café). **GBM**

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