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## Airport Development

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Airport of the Year Award

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### Current Airport of the Year

#### Pinal Airpark near Marana named 2016 Airport of the Year

##### **ADOT announces award at Arizona Airports Association annual conference**

For many years, Pinal Airpark was an isolated facility in the middle of the desert between Phoenix and Tucson best known for the many mothballed jetliners stored there.

It served as a base for large aircraft overhauls. No public flights took place, and no one was allowed in under a long-standing lease with one tenant.

Today, efforts to revitalize the Marana facility are paying off. A new lease, grant funding and collaboration among several agencies have provided Pinal Airpark with the opportunity to reinvent itself. Significant work has been accomplished to improve the facility, including runway rehabilitation and adopting a master plan, all with the goal of becoming more accessible for public use.

For these efforts, the Arizona Department of Transportation has named Pinal Airpark the 2016 Airport of the Year.

The award, presented to the airport's director and staff at the Arizona Airports Association spring conference this week in Flagstaff, recognizes Pinal Airpark's work to overcome challenges that include not meeting assurances required to receive Federal Aviation Administration grants because it leased an entire public airport to one tenant.

"Pinal Airpark was closed off from the public for many years, if not decades, due to an exclusive lease that put it in noncompliance with the FAA," said Michael Klein, ADOT Aeronautics Group manager. "The county's recent efforts to bring the airpark into compliance with FAA assurance requirements show a remarkable commitment on their part."

The Airport of the Year award also recognizes Pinal Airpark dramatically improving its runway and taxiway pavement from a poor condition that affected the airport's eligibility for federal and state grant funds for capital improvements.



Over the past several years, Pinal County made the commitment to turn the airport around. In turn, ADOT's Aeronautics Group made the commitment to support that effort.

"It gave us a lot of life," Pinal Airpark Director Jim Petty said. "All the elements needed for this effort fell into place after many years of not being able to address and cure the issues. It took county leadership, new ownership of the tenant company that held the lease, many hours of negotiation and the guidance of the FAA and ADOT Aeronautics."

The airpark received approximately \$2 million from ADOT Aeronautics through the State Aviation Fund and about \$400,000 from Pinal County for runway rehabilitation and major pavement upgrades. Those improvements dramatically increased its pavement condition score, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rating system used by ADOT Aeronautics. The score is crucial to increasing air traffic and public use of the airport.

The airport is now in the process of re-establishing its eligibility for FAA funds, after receiving none for decades.

As general aviation increases at the once desolate airpark, it still holds on to some of its past. It continues to be a commercial aircraft storage facility that provides maintenance and repair, while drawing in tourists as a boneyard for planes laid to rest, their parts repurposed.

"One of the things I want to do is preserve as much of the airport's past as possible," Petty said. "I want people to learn about and appreciate this airport's glory years, as a place where pilots were trained for World War II and the Korean conflict."

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