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DeKalb airport unveils instrument landing system

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AUBURN — A new instrument landing system was the feature of an open house Thursday at the DeKalb County Airport.

About two dozen people gathered to see Gary Meal of ProFlight fly the ceremonial first ILS approach to the airport. Shortly after 12:30 p.m., a Cessna Citation



525 CJ1 jet owned by Interstate Warehousing flew over at about 200 feet, the decision altitude for the system. Airport manager Russ Couchman rode with Meal for the flight.

The ILS helps guide pilots to a safe landing during low-visibility conditions such as fog and blowing snow.

DeKalb County's ILS has five components. Five miles out from the airport is the outer marker, a radio beacon that tells pilots how far they are from the airport. Based on their speed, pilots can predict how long it will take them to reach the airport.

On the west end of the runway near C.R. 427 is the localizer. Its antennae bounce signals off the ground to give pilots lateral guidance as they come into the airport.

In a field across C.R. 29 from the east end of the runway is the approach lighting system, which helps pilots align their aircraft toward the center of the runway. On an ILS approach, the pilot must see the lights, rather than the pavement, by the time the airplane descends to

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the decision height, which at Auburn is 200 feet. A pilot who cannot see the lights must declare a missed approach and go around for another pass or try to land at a different airport.

Across the runway from the terminal is the glide slope antenna.

"This is really what gives pilots a precision approach," Couchman said. The antenna gives off a signal that guides pilots down to the runway at a 3-degree angle.

Having an ILS is an impressive and important feat for an airport such as DeKalb County's, Couchman said. The ability for pilots to land in low-visibility conditions means the DeKalb County airport has been transformed from a fair-weather airport to one that can be used in most weather conditions.

Couchman said the system is very good for pilots learning to fly using cockpit instruments and practicing ILS approaches and landings.

"It's a training tool," he said. The airport is not as busy as larger airports, which allows pilots to fly ILS approaches in a lower-stress environment.

Couchman said the ILS is just part of the system in place to allow aircraft to land effectively at the airport in different weather and wind conditions. The DeKalb airport is the only non-commercial airport in Indiana with more than localizer performance with vertical guidance (LPV) approach, which means that pilots can land in different wind and weather conditions. This allows the DeKalb County Airport to become more competitive with larger commercial airports.

The ILS has been in place at the DeKalb County Airport since October 2005, but "we've had to work the bugs out of it," Couchman said.

The airport had to change a radio frequency that conflicted with Chicago-O'Hare Airport.

"It was only down for several weeks," Couchman said of DeKalb's system, which he said was good considering the arduous process of changing a radio frequency and informing the proper people about the change.

Couchman said the frequency change, as well as other smaller kinks in the system, delayed the ceremonial first flight until now.

"We didn't want to have an ILS first flight when we knew we'd have a frequency change," he said.

At Thursday's event, Couchman also displayed snow-clearing equipment including a retired county road truck with a sand spreader and a 14-foot blade on the front and a towable broom and blower.

"When we put the ILS in, we came across some new mandates," Couchman said, including one that requires the airport to be able to clear snow within three hours.

Thursday also served as an open house for the airport's new east hangar, which is to be rented to Century Aviation, a new flight school, maintenance shop and aircraft rental business.

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