

FlightSafety International breaks ground on Broken Arrow site

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City, state and aerospace industry leaders saluted FlightSafety International Inc. on Wednesday as the Broken Arrow flight simulator manufacturer broke ground on a \$42 million, 350,000-square-foot plant.

With construction expected to take a year, the new manufacturing facility on a 17-acre site south of 71st Street and Lynn Lane will enable FlightSafety to combine under one roof operations that are now housed in four buildings.

FlightSafety's operations at the new facility also are expected to grow, from 675 employees today to 1,000, said Rick Armstrong, the vice president of simulation.

"Our mission is the safety of people who fly, whether they are helicopter pilots (at the U.S. Army Aviation Center) at Fort Rucker, Ala., Marine pilots, commercial pilots or the 75,000 corporate or general aviation pilots we train every year," Armstrong told 150 people at the groundbreaking ceremony. "The important thing about today is FlightSafety will continue to develop these products in Broken Arrow for 99 years.

"Our focus is to grow our jobs. The community of Broken Arrow will benefit from the high-quality jobs we have, and the jobs will expand in Broken Arrow. Aviation jobs pay almost twice the average job in Oklahoma. Aviation is the top exporting industry in Oklahoma."

Broken Arrow Mayor Mike Lester said the city, Broken Arrow Chamber of Commerce and city and state economic development leaders invested for the future with FlightSafety.

The city is providing FlightSafety the 17-acre site on a 99-year lease at a cost of \$1 per year, Lester said, and it will provide the company with \$6.6 million in infrastructure improvements or economic incentives.

"If we lost them, it's likely we would have never regained a single business with that many jobs," Lester said. "The energy that will be created by this one business will show increases in sales taxes and increases in ad valorem taxes.

"We only look for bigger and better things to happen in Broken Arrow."

Victor Bird, the director of the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission, said FlightSafety makes the best flight simulators in the world. Its retention by Broken Arrow and Oklahoma is a coup at a time when it was being recruited by several states, he said.

"Their average salary of \$55,000 is about double the salary of the average Oklahoman, which is \$30,000," Bird said. "We need to keep and expand these kinds of jobs."

FlightSafety, a flight simulator manufacturing and training company, has its headquarters in New York and is a unit of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. of Omaha, Neb.

FlightSafety designs and manufactures full-motion flight simulators. It operates the world's largest fleet of advanced flight simulators at 43 training centers around the world.

FlightSafety has four buildings in Broken Arrow at 2700 N. Hemlock Circle.

"In the new building there will be faster communications, collaboration and great efficiencies," Armstrong said. We not only do manufacturing (of flight simulators), we do all the design work — 250 of our people are engineers.

"Each simulator we build is replicating an aircraft or type of aircraft. A flight simulator has 10,000 parts to it. The new building will allow us to incorporate lean manufacturing and process improvements."

Officials said FlightSafety's operation in Broken Arrow has an annual payroll of about \$50 million, and the company spends about \$45 million a year in the community on components, supplies and services.

The company's new site includes quick access to the Broken Arrow Expressway, hotels and restaurants. Those services will support FlightSafety's customers and visitors, who total about about 1,000 a year, Armstrong said.

The general contractor for the new building is Crossland Construction of Tulsa.

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Associate Images:

The FlightSafety International facility under construction in Broken Arrow is depicted in this architectural rendering. The \$42 million, 350,000-square-foot plant is being built after the city provided incentives to the flight simulator manufacturer. Courtesy

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