

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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Father's Day Fly-In A Big Success

For 38 years Columbia Airport has been hosting the Father's Day Fly-In and once again it was a safe and fun event. I have heard nothing but praise about the way things were organized and run. Thanks to all that donated their time, expertise, money, and muscle. It takes all of these to make the Fly-In successful.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Alan Wallace for serving as the Fly-In Chairman. I can say from observation that it is a huge job and Alan put in a superb effort. The following people also served on the Fly-In committee and need to be recognized; Shane Wallace – Ramp and Facilities, Jim Murray – Auto & Pedestrian Traffic, Catherine Driver – Media Coordinator, Jan Watson – Hospitality and Patty Haley – Fund Raising.

There were many others that volunteered their time and I want to thank them for helping out this year but there isn't enough space in this bulletin to name them individually.

I look forward to next year's 39th annual event and hopefully working with many of the same people and many more new volunteers as well.

Baseline Crew

We will be utilizing the CDF Baseline Crew to do some brushing and grass removal at both airports for fire prevention purposes. The Airports Department has used Baseline in the past, so this is nothing new. CDF has some requirements that need to be followed by the airport when the crew is working. I'd

like to let everyone know these requirements in the event that you happen to be at either Columbia or Pine Mountain Lake Airport when the Baseline Crew is working. Keep in mind that the CDF Baseline Crew is made up of people that have been incarcerated but are allowed to work outside the prison under strict supervision and control.

First, the Baseline Crew is supervised and all crewmembers must work in close proximity of each other. Individual crewmembers should not be off by themselves.

There should be no interaction between the crewmembers and the public. This means no talking and absolutely no giving or receiving of items of any kind. No sodas, no candy bars, no notes, no nothing.

Lastly, these guys don't want to jeopardize their privilege to work on the Baseline Crew so don't tempt them or heckle them, just let them do the work they are hired to do.

The Airports get great value from the Baseline Crew work. It is a win-win situation. The Baseline Crew members get the benefit of being in a less restrictive environment and the airports get the benefit of inexpensive casual labor and a reduction in the fire potential.

Grass Runway Maintenance

We fertilized the grass runway on July 9th and then watered it like crazy to wash the fertilizer into the soil. To keep the aircraft from tearing up the turf when it was saturated we closed the runway for 3 days.

A NOTAM was issued indicating that Runway 29 was closed, but many local pilots don't check for NOTAMS prior to

local flights. In the interest of safety and the preservation of the grass runway, I would like to remind everyone that they should keep an eye out for an “X” on the 29 blast pad indicating the runway is closed.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

Columbia Airport is usually a pretty quiet place with only a moderate amount of air traffic except when there is a fly-in or a fire. Yesterday we had a wildfire just west of Jamestown and the CDF air tankers and helicopters went into action. There were 4 S2T air tankers and 3 helicopters working the fire. This fire was only about 8 miles from Columbia Airport, which made for a quick turn-around for the air tankers. It seemed like we had an air tanker taking off or landing about every 5 minutes.

For those pilots that don’t know, the S2T air tankers take off on Runway 17 and land on Runway 35. They do this because Runway 17 provides a downhill take-off and Runway 35 provides an up-hill landing. It also eliminates any taxi time, thus providing more time to fight the fires. The pilots of the air tankers are very professional. They generally fly a standard pattern, announce their position and intentions on each leg of the pattern, and they are used to flying in crowded airspace with limited visibility.

Most pilots flying in and out of Columbia usually use Runway 17 even though the winds can sometimes favor Runway 35. During yesterday’s fire we had a “close encounter” where an aircraft departing on Runway 17 took evasive action to avoid an air tanker turning final on Runway 35. I happened to have my radio turned on and heard the air tanker pilot report downwind, base, and turning final. I don’t recall hearing any radio transmission from the departing aircraft.

Pilots often remind me that it is not a requirement to talk on the radio at non-towered airports. Let me quote from the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), Chapter 4, Section 1, Paragraph 4-1-9.a, Airport Operations Without Operating

Control Tower. “To achieve the greatest degree of safety, it is **essential** that all radio-equipped aircraft transmit/receive on a common frequency identified for the purpose of airport advisories.” Also, the AIM states in Paragraph 4-1-9.c, Recommended Traffic Advisory Practices, that, “Pilots of inbound traffic **should** monitor and communicate as appropriate on the designated CTAV from 10 miles to landing. Pilots of departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency from start-up, during taxi, and until 10 miles from the airport”.

The key words used in the AIM are “essential” and “should”. Webster’s defines essential as “of the utmost importance” and should as “to express obligation”. To me this means that it is of utmost importance that pilots use their radios and that pilots have an obligation to others to talk on the radio. Had the departing aircraft been properly using its radio, the “close encounter” most likely would not have occurred.

In plain simple English (pun intended), I believe it is “stupid” not to use your radio properly when operating in and around non-towered airports. Additionally, the failure to use your radio can endanger you and your passengers, not to mention the other pilot that may be following proper radio procedures.

Stupid Pilot Tricks is a monthly article that attempts to raise awareness of safety and courtesy issues around our airports.

The Manager’s Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

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