

The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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New Columbia AWOS Soon To Be Commissioned

The upgraded Columbia AWOS is scheduled to be installed the first week in October. This system is brand new. The only old parts of the system that will be used are the concrete pads, weather proof boxes, tower, conduit and security fencing. We will have all new sensors, computer and wiring. Additionally, the new system will be accessible through the internet. FAA acceptance testing is scheduled for October 3rd after which the new AWOS should be fully operational.

Once the new AWOS is connected to the internet, pilots should be able to view the AWOS information at any time. I'll post the internet address as soon as we have it available. I encourage any business or organization that would like to put a link to our AWOS on their website to do so. The dial up phone number for the AWOS will remain unchanged and is 209-536-9384.

Reroofing the PML Airport Pilot's Lounge

Over the years the sun and weather has taken a toll on the composite roofing on the Pine Mountain Lake Airport Pilot's Lounge. We have been fortunate that the roof has never leaked. It had been expected that the Pilot's Lounge would be replaced by a new commercial hangar in 2009, but no proposals were received in response to the hangar Request for Proposals (RFP) issued earlier this year. Since the Pilot's Lounge will remain in place for the foreseeable future, replacement of the roof has now become a priority project.

The airport maintenance staff is in the process of removing the old roofing, inspecting the roof sheeting, installing additional fascia boards, and reworking the flashing. Once the repair work is completed a PML Airport work day will be held to install new tar paper and roofing. The tentative date for this work day is Thursday, October 9th. The Pine Mountain Lake Aviation Association has expressed interest in helping with this project and they have several members that are scheduled to help. Their support of any airport maintenance and improvement project is always appreciated.

New Hangar Progress Report

Gold Country Hangars has an Option to Lease for the construction of new hangars at both Columbia and Pine Mountain Lake Airports. They have been working diligently with the Airports Department, County Fire and the Building Official to develop a plan that will meet everyone's requirements. Issues that are being worked are property line setbacks, building height concerns, fire protection and topography limitations. The two most difficult issues are fire protection and topography. Although the fire protection requirements have changed, there is still a requirement for sprinklers in larger hangar buildings. An alternative to sprinklers is to construct several smaller buildings with separate roof structures and fire separation walls. The slope of the ground at the planned hangar building location at Pine Mountain Lake Airport is making it a challenge to design hangars that don't have too much slope and still allow easy entry and exit through the hangar doors.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

What? No Weather Information!

I have to confess that I am absolutely amazed at the level of confusion and concern that has been expressed by pilots because our Columbia Airport AWOS is out of service. I don't think we have ever received so many calls from pilots phoning to find out why our AWOS was not working and voicing their concern that they might have difficulty flying to Columbia Airport because there was no weather information. Our verbal assurance that the weather was CAVU (Ceilings And Visibility Unlimited) often would not put the nervous pilot's mind at ease. We tell the pilots that the windsock and the tetrahedron work just fine and that wind checks can be obtained from Bald Eagle Aviation over the UNICOM frequency, but the nervousness remains.

A NOTAM was filed as soon as our AWOS maintenance contractor told us the system was unrepairable. Yet, few pilots check NOTAMs or obtain weather briefings when flying to Columbia Airport. These days most everyone has access to a computer and by going to the website for NOTAMs at <https://pilotweb.nas.faa.gov/distribution/home.html> allows a pilot to enter any airport to check for Safety NOTAMs. Also, TFRs can be checked at the web address <http://tfr.faa.gov/tfr2/list.html>.

So why is not having an AWOS such a big deal? When I was taking my flying lessons we were taught to simply over-fly the airport and look at the windsock then select the runway that had the most favorable wind. Simple enough don't you think? With today's GPS information, it is fairly easy to determine the wind direction simply by flying overhead on a runway heading and checking your ground speed then comparing it with your true airspeed. A difference between the two greater than 5 knots should be easily determined allowing the pilot to select the best runway for landing.

If a pilot were to inadvertently select a downwind landing, the pilot should be alert enough to execute a go-around if the sight

picture does not look right. All pilots should know what "high and fast" looks like and then make the decision to abort their landing and then try landing on the opposite runway. The reason I'm saying all this is because I have seen numerous pilots at Columbia Airport choose to land on Runway 35 even though the winds favor Runway 17.

A big part of basic airmanship is to know what the winds are doing at all times; during the takeoff, enroute and when landing. If an AWOS is not available, here are some other things all pilots can use to help them determine wind conditions.

1. Internet weather sites or weather briefings during flight planning
2. Windsocks, wind tees, tetrahedrons
3. Flags waiving in the breeze
4. Trees blowing on the ground
5. Smoke from a fire or smoke stack
6. Waves on a lake, pond, or river
7. Cloud conditions
8. Type of turbulence encountered
9. GPS track vs. heading
10. GPS ground speed vs. true air speed
11. Visual clues out the windscreen
12. Flight Watch on 122.0
13. AWOS along your route of flight
14. ATIS along your route of flight
15. Info from other pilots via the radio

AWOSs are machines that are pretty darn reliable, but they are still subject to failure. While they provide useful information, they should not become a critical factor on whether to fly or land at a particular airport especially when there are so many other ways to obtain weather information.

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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