

# The Manager's Approach



Vol. 10 Issue 1

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

September, 2011

## *County Reorganization*

The County reorganized the Airports Department in July of 2010 making it a division of the Public Works Department. With this organizational change I was given the responsibility of managing the new Fleet Services Division and the Radio Coordinator. Along with this change came a new title for me of Deputy Director of Operations of Public Works. At the same time this reorganization took place, two key employees of the Airports Department retired. Together they had a combined 60 years with the County.

Last year was certainly a challenging year for the Airports because not only did we have to hire and train two new airport employees but we began using the Public Works staff to do all of our accounting. All this was in addition to my extended management responsibilities.

In July of this year, there was another reorganization in which the Public Works Department was abolished and the Airports Department became a part of the County Administrator's Office. Additionally, Fleet Service and the Radio Coordinator were removed from my management responsibility. So, in a way, the recent reorganization changed things back to the way they were two years ago with only a few minor differences. The Airports are no longer a Department or a Division but just a group located under the County Administrator.

## *Fiscal Year Budget*

The County's budget year is from July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup> and is called the fiscal year. Since this time period covers portions of two calendar years, the fiscal year is

typically named for the second year. In other words, the fiscal year we are currently working is FY12 which is sometimes also called FY11-12. This year's budgets for the two airports are shown below rounded to the nearest thousand dollars.

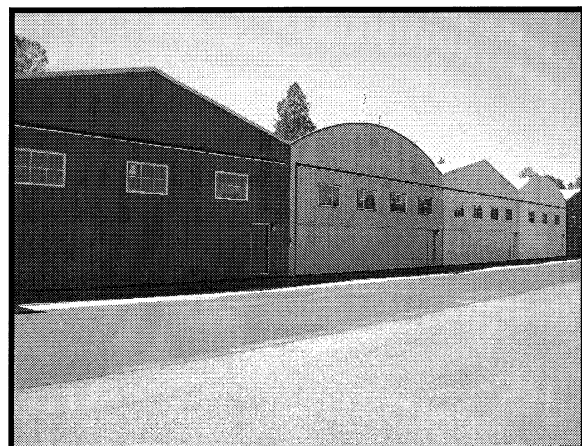
Columbia Airport - \$399,000

PML Airport - \$87,000

As you can see the Pine Mountain Lake Airport budget is about 20% of the size of the Columbia Airport budget. A quick comparison of the physical acreage of the two airports shows that the Pine Mountain Lake Airport is only 15% of the size of the Columbia Airport. When comparing the number of tenants, Pine Mountain Lake Airport has 23% of the tenants of Columbia Airport.

## *New Hangar Construction*

Phase I of the Gold Country Hangars was completed last year and all the hangars are rented out. Now Gold Country Hangars has begun construction of Phase II which will consist of 4 medium sized box hangars located along Taxiway Charlie, just east of their Phase I hangars.



New Hangars at Columbia – Phase I

## *Busy Fire Season*

If for some reason you didn't notice, we had a very long and wet winter. Many of us were going crazy waiting for good flying weather to arrive. Along with the abundance of rain came a delay in the official start of our fire season and the arrival of the Cal Fire Air tankers. Now we are experiencing a full on fire season and the air tankers seem to fly daily. As I'm typing this article two air tankers are working the Motor Fire located in the Merced River canyon. Yesterday, there were as many as five air tankers working this fire.

As most of our local pilots know the air tankers usually take off on Columbia's Runway 17 and land on Runway 35. By doing this they can quickly refill with retardant and get back in the air and to the fire. Visiting pilots may get confused by an air tanker landing on Runway 35 when most other airplanes are using Runway 17. When this happens, pilots need to be vigilant in looking for other aircraft and verbal by talking to other pilots in the area to determine which runway they should use.

It is important that all pilots recognize that fire fighting aircraft always have the right of way and that sometimes it may be best to orbit away from the airport or hold on the ground and let the fire fighting aircraft arrive or depart quickly.

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### *Stupid Pilot Tricks*

#### *Verifying the Pattern Direction*

It doesn't happen too often but occasionally I'll see an aircraft flying a left hand pattern for Runway 17 at Columbia or Runway 27 at Pine Mountain Lake. A pattern is left hand traffic if all the turns are made to the left and right hand traffic if all the turns are made to the right.

A left hand traffic pattern is commonly used because most aircraft have the pilot sitting on the left side so left turns provide the pilot with a better view of the airport. However, the FAA requires each airport operator to specify the direction of flight while in the

traffic pattern and this is usually determined by the presence of any obstructions (terrain, towers, or buildings) or to avoid having pilots fly over parks, schools, open air theaters, etc. At Columbia Airport our traffic patterns are established to the west of the airport so that aircraft won't normally fly over Columbia School and Columbia State Park. At Pine Mountain Lake Airport the traffic pattern is established to the north of the runway so aircraft won't normally fly over the lake or the golf course. To accomplish this, Tuolumne County has specified right traffic for Runways 11 and 17 at Columbia Airport and right traffic for Pine Mountain Lake Airport's Runway 27.

The direction of a runway's traffic pattern at an uncontrolled airport is shown by the airport's segmented circle, in the FAA Airport Facility Directory and in pilot and airport guides. Each pilot should identify the pattern direction prior to arriving at an airport or by flying over head and looking at the airport's segmented circle. The center of the segmented circle contains a wind sock so that the runway most favorable to the wind can also be easily determined.

Pilots that fly the wrong direction traffic pattern are essentially telling everyone watching that they did not do their preflight homework or that they didn't verify the traffic pattern by observing the segmented circle.

*The Manager's Approach is published by the Tuolumne County Airports Manager for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:*

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### *Noise Sensitive Areas*

As a reminder to our local pilots, we have several noise sensitive areas near our airports. Maps showing these areas are posted at both airports. Please be neighborly and avoid these areas.