

ST. PAUL

EDITOR DON EFFENBERGER 651-228-5559

ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS WWW.TWINCITIES.COM

ELSEWHERE

BLAINE

Eatery needs investors for takeoff

Aviation enthusiast sees need for food, event space, store

BY MARY BAUER
Pioneer Press

Craig Schiller believes the time is ripe for a restaurant and meeting space at the Anoka County Airport, a popular spot for hobbyist pilots and collectors of vintage aircraft.

He's pretty sure others think so, too, so he's offering to let them in on the ground floor by selling shares of stock for a buck apiece. He only has to sell 925,000 shares.

"I wanted any Joe Blow in the community and anyone interested in aviation to be a part of this if they wanted," said Schiller, who created a company, Flight Line, to achieve his plans.

He believes the interest from pilots and collectors is strong enough to fund a 50,000-square-foot restaurant, event center and gift shop on the south end of the airport in Blaine.

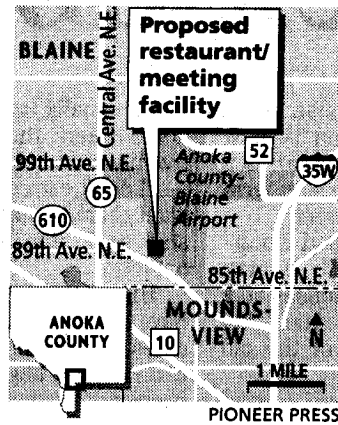
Schiller said a bank is willing to finance the construction and initial operation costs, estimated to run \$3.2 million. Funds from the stock sale would provide the down payment, plus a cushion for fluctuations in construction costs.

The airport already is popular with aviators but could be more so, said Schiller, a pilot. Like motorcyclists and vintage car owners, owners of small aircraft love zooming off on a summer day for a bite to eat, he said. But small airports with restaurants are rare.

"There are so few of those," said Lyn Mohr of Vadnais Heights, an early investor in

Airport restaurant

Craig Schiller says the time is ripe for a restaurant and meeting facility at the Anoka County Airport.



FYI

To learn about Flight Line Ltd., contact Craig Schiller at 763-784-6400 or go to www.flightlineltd.com.

the project. "It's a nice day for flying, and you want to go somewhere. You don't want to rent a car or find one at the airport" for lunch.

She said she also trusts Schiller's organizational skills.

Schiller has a long history with the airport and was director of the Polar Aviation Museum, a popular attraction that closed in 1999 because of liability fears. He now works for Greg Herrick, president of a St. Paul direct marketing business, overseeing facilities at the airport where Herrick stores

much of his vintage plane collection.

Schiller's immersion in aviation history would show in plans for the restaurant to include memorabilia commemorating famous pilots and planes. Displays would pay homage to Minnesota pilots such as Charles Lindbergh and notable aviators from U.S. wars.

"We want visitors to come in and enjoy a nice meal, but I want them to learn something," Schiller said.

Schiller is planning a deck on the restaurant and says his site on the south side of the airport would allow diners to overlook the entire airport.

"Believe it or not, people will just sit there and watch airplanes take off and land," Mohr said.

Schiller also hopes to catch a tailwind from Blaine's growth, which he said cries out for event space. In recent years, Schiller oversaw a sideline in which Herrick rented space to groups for weddings and parties held amid his collection.

"There was a huge demand for the events," Schiller said. "We were turning away more business than we could take on."

The airport is one of six reliever airports operated by the Metropolitan Airports Commission. Schiller has rented 8½ acres for the project from the agency and now needs only the cash.

He's relying on a little-used tool called the Small Corporate Offering Registration, or SCOR. The program allows small companies to raise up to \$1 million

a year by selling securities without the expense and paperwork of a full-fledged offering, such as those used by public companies. The stock is not publicly traded.

According to the Minnesota Department of Commerce, nine companies have tried the SCOR approach since Minnesota lawmakers put it into statute in 1997. The stock sales on four were still open in 2005, and so far, only one company sold all of its SCOR stock: James Page Brewing Co.

The financing mechanism is sometimes seen as a good vehicle for companies with a loyal following committed to the premise.

Schiller thinks the airport and the surrounding community have the kind of support to make the project fly. He suggests investors buy 1,000 shares of stock at a time, and he said he won't sell small amounts like 50 shares because the cost of issuing the stock consumes too much of the cash. No one buys just one share of a \$5 stock from a broker anyway, he said.

Last year, Schiller sent information packets to 270 people connected with the airport and with Blaine. So far, he has sold less than 10 percent of the available stock, although interest has picked up in recent months. He said he has commitments and pledges for additional sales.

"Each week, I open the mailbox, and people out of the blue are asking for information," he said. "It's going in the right direction."

Mary Bauer can be reached at mbauer@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5311.