

# Local airport manager named 'Airport Manager of the Year'

By **ASHLEY TOMPKINS**  
**Tribune City Editor**

Three years after taking home honors as Texas' top airport, Mount Pleasant Regional Airport Manager Paul Henderson has a new award to add to his wall at work – General Aviation Airport Manager of the Year.

Henderson earned the statewide honor earlier this month in Austin at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Aviation conference.

"I really had no idea that I was going to receive the award. It was not expected, but it is an honor," Henderson said.

The airport manager traveled to Austin to attend what he thought was the agency's three-day annual conference to take advantage of airport presentations and meet with other managers.

It wasn't until Henderson saw Mount Pleasant City Manager Courtney Sharp, several city councilmen and members of the airport's board rounding the banquet room corner that his relaxing night took a different turn.

"I saw them coming around the corner and I thought 'Oh no. I'm going to have to give an acceptance speech.' I was amazed to see them," Henderson said. "I was really amazed that four of the five council members came."

In all, 24 Mount Pleasant representatives filled three tables to witness Henderson being honored.

"I appreciate the award, but like I said that night, this really is a team effort. It's not just me," he noted. "I don't do this all on my own. A lot of my team had flown to Austin to be there."

Henderson, who took over the airport's helm in 2002, came on board just two months before the airport moved into its new facility.

"Since he's been manager, along with the airport board, he has managed to get the length of the runway increased to accommodate larger airplanes," said Doug Reider, TxDOT district RAMP (Routine Airport Maintenance Program) coordinator.

Reider nominated Henderson for the award.

Henderson is credited with being forward thinking and involved, making sure the needs of his airport are met. He often greets customers on the ramp with a smile and keeps the airport maintained.

"We've seen this airport completely change from the old airport to the new facility and there are not very many cities or counties that are building a brand new airport," Reider continued. "They've made leaps and bounds with regards to aviation in Titus County and this area."

Like most boys at a young age, Henderson dreamed of flying airplanes. It wasn't until he reached his late 20s that he pursued that goal with flying lessons in Sulphur Springs.

"I was fascinated with airplanes and wanted to learn to fly them, but I just never got around to it," Henderson said. "Once I started taking lessons, I'd make up excuses to fly somewhere.

In his cloth-covered Citabria, Henderson traveled to Arizona, California, Florida, Montana, and Mexico while operating a steel fabrication business in Pittsburg.

Tragedy struck in 2002 with the death of former airport manager John DeWitt.

The city was looking for a new leader and Henderson stepped in.

During the past six years, the Mount Pleasant Regional Airport has continued to grow and right now is in the process of adding 1,000 feet to its runway. Henderson pushed for the project because it will allow the airport to better accommodate its business customers.

The extension will also allow larger airplanes to successfully land in Mount Pleasant and will meet the city's future growth.

He's also overseeing the addition of new hangers to house six mid-size airplanes. Not wanting to take credit, he attributed much of the growth to the city council and airport board.

"We're lucky that we have a city council and airport board that is forward thinking and realizes this airport is an economic development tool," Henderson said.

Erman Hensel, councilman and member of the airport board, has no problem bragging on Henderson.

"The City of Mount Pleasant is very lucky to have a person in charge of our airport like Paul. He is an extremely hard working, committed and passionate person regarding his job and the airport," Hensel said.

Butch Petty, who works with Henderson, added the manager puts everything he has into the airport.

"He puts it above everything else," Petty said. "He does a great job and really cares about the airport growing. Whatever needs to be done, he takes care of it."

For Henderson, he gets to live his childhood dream each day.

"I would have never thought that I would become an airport manager, but I love it," he said.

"Few folks get to have jobs that they really love and are always glad to go to," he said. "I get that. I showed up at just the right time and now I get to handle one of the nicest airports in East Texas."