

John "Mac" McGuire was a former Navy enlisted aviator, retired on a small farm in Compton, MD. He put in a grass strip and built a T-hangar for his Cessna 182 adjacent to his house. Although content with his personal flying arrangement, Mac saw the need for a County airport in the mid-sixties. He approached the St. Mary's County Commissioners with his idea and was told it was a great idea, but some suitable property was needed. Preferably the 'airport' would be located in the center of the County and must not interfere with the Naval Air Station operations at Patuxent River. Mac was well aware of the restricted air operations zones that the Navy had set up with the FAA. He also knew about the ten or so private airstrips, such as his, scattered about the County. None of the private strips were suitable for develop as a public use airport and to meet the above restrictions. Searching the Planning and Zoning records and then overflying the area, he decided on the future airport location.

The acreage was a former County Land Fill. This location had been closed as being full and sold at public auction. Being a former dump in the middle of swamp land, the couple hundred acre property had one bidder and sold for \$100. Mac cultivated a 'good old boy' relationship with the property owner, flying out for "\$100 hamburgers" and generally being best buds. He often mentioned that the County needed a public airport and his buddy readily agreed: "It would be good for the County development and would support the Navy operations." One nice spring day Mac invited his buddy to go for another airplane ride just sightseeing around the County. Overflying a brush and tree covered, swampy area just off Rt. 235, Mac remarked that would be a nice spot for a County airport. His passenger agreed and inquired "Who owns that property?" Mac replied "You do." His passenger was Mervel Dean.

Shortly thereafter the property was deeded back to the County for \$1. Grants from the state and FAA were applied for. The County Commissioners appropriated funds. Planning engineers were hired. An Airport Commission was chartered with contractual authority. Construction began. The first open house in 1971 displayed a paved access road from Route 235, a 3000 by 50-foot asphalt runway, a paved mid-field turnoff and paved 200 by 200-foot parking area with a 4-foot high chain link fence across the middle dividing the aircraft and car parking areas. The aircraft parking area had no tie-downs and was a smaller section of what is now the State Police and MedStar ramp; the airport had no buildings, hangars, fuel or restrooms. The first open house offered airplane rides for a penny-a-pound provided by local pilots based at surrounding air strips. My three-year old son had his first airplane ride after waiting four hours in line.

Two years later, the County contracted for an 80 by 80-foot steel-truss hangar with an attached 20 by 80-foot addition for offices and rest rooms. A low profile gasoline pump was placed in the middle of the ramp along with a buried 6,000 gallon fuel storage tank. The Airport

Commission contracted for a Fixed Base Operator to provide aircraft maintenance, fuel and limited storage. The FBO installed ramp tie-downs and subsequent grass tie downs.

In 1978 the Maryland State Police Aviation Division built a 60 by 60-foot hangar with office addition to house a 4-place Jet Ranger helicopter to be used for search and limited medivac missions. The State Police hangar was located at the edge of the original ramp of 1971.

A series of FBO operations continued aircraft service and maintenance along with 100LL fuel service under sole source contracts to the County. Bob Cooper was the last FBO operator under the no-bid system. In 1984 the County Ethics Board determined that the FBO contracts must be let under competitive bid. The statement of work specified that the FBO must provide a certified flight school and build T hangars for rent in addition to aircraft service, maintenance and 100LL fuel. Four vendors submitted bids; two bids were rejected because they did not propose a flight school to begin at start of operations. After a contentious evaluation Mechdyne, Inc. was selected with operations to begin on April 1, 1985. Under the Mechdyne contract McDonald Flying service moved from Park Hall Airport and commenced flight school operations at 2W6 on April 1. Ed Stewart started aircraft service operation the same day; eventually employing two full-time A&P mechanics and nineteen part-time mechanics. At start-up 100LL fuel price, as set by the previous FBO, was \$2.62 per gallon, the highest price in the four-state area. With aggressive marketing the fuel price was cut \$0.02 to \$0.05 per gallon every three weeks. In six months the fuel price was down to \$1.57 per gallon, a minimum of 5 cents lower than any other FBO in a 100-mile area. Two line boys were hired just to pump fuel.

With the Airport Commission approval, the Mechdyne FBO contract was sold to Atlantic Airways, Inc., a charter carrier based at BWI airport, Baltimore, Maryland in 1986. Atlantic wanted to expand their charter operation into a commuter service between Baltimore, Washington, DC, Richmond and Norfolk. Atlantic continued the aircraft services set up by Mechdyne. Atlantic lobbied for and helped obtain FAA, State of MD, and County funding to build a commuter terminal. Atlantic built the first two rows of T hangars in 1987.

The Maryland Aviation Administration purchased an Instrument Landing System (ILS) for Runway 29 to support the proposed aircraft commuter operation and contracted for a survey for the ILS installation. The consultants for the ILS installation reported that Runway 29 was not suitable for an ILS installation; the runway would need to be reoriented 13 degrees counter-clockwise, moved 1,100 feet further West and a new runway approach clear zone established. Additional property would need to be purchased by the County. Four homes to the North of the airport would need to be purchased, families relocated and the houses demolished. At the required public hearing at the new Terminal building the high bay area was packed by the family members and their friends. The crowd was loud and just barely under control in their opposition to the runway change. Only Atlantic and Mechdyne made favorable presentations.

Needless to say, the County Commissioners caved and the runway reorientation project was canceled at the next Commissioners business meeting.

Without the required ILS, Atlantic soon lost interest in the commuter startup and quietly sought a sale for their 2W6 FBO operation. Art Bildman, a well-established shopping center developer in the Baltimore area, was recruited by Atlantic. Since he knew nothing about operating small airports, he turned to Mechdyne for advice. Mechdyne produced a 15-year business plan for Art. Art's son, Steve Bildman, was appointed the President and CEO of newly formed AirTech, Inc. The Airport Commission readily approved the sale of the Mechdyne contract to AirTech in 1989.

With the introduction of dynamic and well qualified leadership and importantly, readily available capitulation, growth surged at 2W6. New up-scale T hangars, maintenance hangars and an aircraft paint facility were installed. The antiquated 100LL fuel service was modernized with new self-service equipment. Jet-A fuel was now available for the King Air fleet operated by AirTech supporting NAS Patuxent River Test and Evaluation Operations.

In 1991 the Sky Diving Association of Greater Washington sought permission from the Airport Commission to start a sky diving school. The Airport Commission denied the application citing the proposed drop zone on the airport property was too small. The sky divers sued in federal court citing discrimination and violation of FARs. The County lost the suit and was forced to grant a five-year contract to the sky divers. Protected by federal court, the sky divers refused to attend monthly meetings with the airport commission or pay operations fees to the County as required in their contract. Knowing that a sky diver had right of way over aircraft, the sky divers freely landed anywhere it suited them, often forcing aircraft in the landing pattern to take evasive maneuvers. After nearly five years of this reckless operation, the Airport Commission served notice that the Sky Diver contract would not be renewed. AirTech, the hangar owner that the sky divers operated from, refused to renew the sky diver hangar lease, citing non-payment of rent for two years. The sky divers sued all concerned. The Airport Commission lost the suit and was forced to pay all court costs. AirTech won their suit and the sky divers were ordered to vacate the hangar. The sky divers rented a construction trailer and set up operations near their stated drop zone on the airport. They continued operations for another nine months before abruptly vacating and moving to Ocean City airport.

The Base Relocation And Consolidation (BRAC) program resulted in Naval Air Systems Command moving to NAS Patuxent River in 1998. Other Naval test operations moving from New Jersey and Pennsylvania also contributed to the need for more charter operations, corporate activity and private aircraft activity. AirTech was well positioned to service this increased business. The terrorist attacks of 9-11-2001 prompted heavy restrictions on general aviation flying at the Washington, DC, close-in airports. Many GA aircraft owners sought to

relocate their operations at relatively unrestricted outlying airports such as 2W6. The sudden demand for corporate and private T hangars has fueled continuing construction at 2W6.