

MAINTAINING A CLEAR VISION

As Demands Change, Needs for Safety, Security and Client Service Remain Consistent

Construction techniques, technology, services and needs all tend to evolve — and after nearly four decades, such ongoing advancements combine into next-generation approaches, even new species of business.

But one thing remains constant: commitment.

“Safety, security and customer service are always — always — top of mind for airports,” says Bret Pilney, vice president in the Aviation Group at Burns & McDonnell. “No matter what an airport operator is working on, it has to be safe and secure — for airlines, for passengers, for employees, for everyone. And that goes along with customer service. To get projects done, and to make them successful in a 24/7 environment, you cannot afford to ease up. You must meet and exceed your clients’ needs and expectations.”

For Randy Pope, the group’s senior vice president, commitment means taking the right approach — every time.

“That’s what good airports do,” he says. “That’s what they expect. That’s what they need.”

Since joining the firm in 1978, Pope has worked on projects from nearby Kansas City International Airport to hubs around the world: a wide-body hangar in Hawaii, a corporate flight center outside the nation’s capital, military support facilities in Egypt and dozens more at points in between.

While he’s seen plenty of change during his 38 years — he’s helped update fire codes, for example, for fueling systems, hangars, terminals and passenger boarding bridges — he knows clients will continue to desire and deserve the full, detailed and innovative attention they’ve come to expect from their contracting professionals. Airports may be busier than ever with design and construction projects, but that doesn’t mean they have to sacrifice results.

As Pope prepares to retire at the end of this year, the projects he’s worked on — and the industry initiatives he’s helped lead — offer some signals for the future.

HANGARS

Among Pope’s early projects was planning and design for an aircraft maintenance facility for China Airlines in Taipei, Taiwan. Back in the 1970s, the airline needed room for its growing fleet, as the Boeing 747 became airlines’ international workhorse.

The hangar would be big enough to cover two Boeing 747s. As electrical engineer, he worked on 400-Hz and 60-Hz power systems in the power shops and ramp areas, in coordination with local professionals.

Years later he would help Burns & McDonnell land an even larger project, this time on China’s mainland: design for a four-bay, wide-body overhaul and maintenance base at Shanghai Pudong International Airport. The facility was designed to handle four 747s at once, and to include state-of-the-art paint

ventilation and energy systems, Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) fire protection systems and environmental controls for waste stream minimization and management.

The projects carry lessons that continue to resonate today, in a world that is more connected than ever: No matter what language spoken or which governments are involved or where projects are being executed, clients deserve solutions that break new ground but retain safe, consistent excellence.

“Hangar designs continue to evolve, taking advantage of innovations in systems and materials,” says Eric Bahr, a project manager in the Aviation Group at Burns & McDonnell. “More effective and efficient fire protection systems, new door designs, LED high bay lighting and a host of other innovations will be built into our future hangar designs.”

FIRE SAFETY

As a principal member of the National Fire Protection Association Technical Committee on Airport Facilities, Pope has helped update fire code standards ranging from those governing aircraft hangars and fueling ramp drainage to standards covering construction and protection of airport terminal buildings and aircraft loading walkways.

Last year the National Fire Protection Association included code updates to allow passenger boarding bridges — typically bland, metal boxes — in U.S. airports to be built with glass instead.

“Glass boarding bridges offer great views and are much more aesthetically pleasing than the boxes that are prevalent at U.S. airport terminals,” says Pope, who chaired the NFPA task force that recommended the change. “While glass can be more expensive, the investment can come with significant environmental advantages. Designers will find the option worth considering, now and in the future.” 🌱

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BRET PILNEY
VICE PRESIDENT

