

The Columbus Dispatch

Direct Air will offer new flights to Florida

Rickenbacker hub for twice-a-week service

By Steve Wartenberg THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

There soon will be another option for central Ohio travelers headed to Walt Disney World or the beaches of Tampa and St. Petersburg in Florida.

Direct Air will begin twice-a-week year-round service from Rickenbacker Airport to Lakeland Linder Regional Airport in Lakeland, Fla., between Orlando and Tampa, on June 17.

It will add another year-round flight to a second Florida destination in the fall.

“It will be to southwest Florida, but I can’t say what city just yet,” said Kay Ellison, a Direct Air managing partner.

The flights to Lakeland will be on Thursday and Sunday.

“We’re thrilled to have another market being served,” said David Whitaker, vice president of business development for the Columbus Regional Airport Authority.

The authority offers incentives for airlines to start new routes from Port Columbus or Rickenbacker. For the Lakeland flight, the airline received a one-time payment of \$75,000 for marketing, and landing and terminal fees were waived for one year, which is valued at \$50,000, Whitaker said.

Direct Air also announced it will resume seasonal service to Myrtle Beach on May 23. “Our business model is to use secondary airports, and we’ve had a great relationship with Rickenbacker,” Ellison said.

Through midnight Wednesday, Direct Air is offering a reduced rate of \$99 each way from Rickenbacker to Lakeland, although certain restrictions may apply.

Orlando and Tampa are the No. 1 and No. 4 destinations, respectively, from Port Columbus, as about 750 passengers a day fly to these two popular vacation spots.

Whitaker said the new Direct Air flights will not hurt passenger totals for Southwest and AirTran airlines, which serve those cities from Port Columbus.

“They’re both very large markets and seem to respond to additional flights by growing the market size,” he said.

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