

The Columbus Dispatch

Editorial

City's 'front door' improved

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A three-year remodeling project at Port Columbus is designed to give visitors a good first impression of the nation's 15th largest city, so the terminal has a brighter, modern vibe and better technology and mechanical systems.

But the airport also made sure that it gives visitors a taste of the region's cuisine and show off its welcoming business climate.

Locally based restaurants Donatos Pizza, Bob Evans Express and Eddie George's Grille 27 are offering fliers a break from the unremarkable food at most airports.

In the baggage claim area, Experience Columbus has designed murals highlighting local attractions. And Nationwide, Express, Huntington Bancshares and other companies are advertising in the airport as part of the "One of Us" campaign that features local employers.

It's all part of what Elaine Roberts, CEO of the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, sees as presenting an impressive "front door to the community."

Port Columbus has been renovated several times, including in 1998. But even as the airport eyes the need for a new terminal in 2030, the airport must remain functional to keep up with a growing city.

Andy Vasey, president of Vasey Aviation consulting, called the improvements a wise and measured approach that avoided the temptation — and the heavy debt that comes with it — of building a "Taj Mahal." Most renovations were practical, paid for with capital reserves and the usual facility charges assessed on airline tickets at most airports.

"The leadership at the airport (has) taken a very sensible approach, instead of going for a very large new project that would greatly increase the cost to airlines," Vasey said.

While an \$80 million renovation budget might not sound modest to most homeowners, it wasn't overboard for an airport terminal first opened in 1958. And the nearly 7 million passengers who come and go from the airport each year did get some bling for the dollars spent: There is a nicer lobby, bigger flight-status screens and new paint,

seating, flooring and restrooms. And large medallions inset on the arrival and departure floors feature a globe and references to Ohio landmarks.

While flying once was fun, today harried travelers are packed tighter into planes after they undergo a stressful screening process. It's nice to see Port Columbus invest in comfortable amenities and bring some glamour back to air travel.