

The Columbus Dispatch

Local airports' CEO, Elaine Roberts, to retire by end of year

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Elaine Roberts, the longtime president and CEO of the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, will retire by the end of the year, and efforts began Tuesday to find a successor.

Roberts will leave the airport authority “in a robust financial position with a beautiful passenger facility bearing a compelling new name, a burgeoning intermodal transportation hub and a proud record of community service,” said Susan Tomasky, chairwoman of the airport authority board.

Tomasky said at Tuesday’s board meeting that an outside firm will conduct a nationwide search for Roberts’ replacement.

Roberts assured the board that she’s committed to a smooth transition.

Roberts came to Columbus in December 2000 as executive director of the Columbus Airport Authority, which managed what was then called Port Columbus. She became the first leader of the regional airport authority when it was created in 2003 with the merger of the operations of Port Columbus with those of Franklin County-controlled Rickenbacker airport. Rickenbacker is now primarily a cargo airport.

A search committee to find her successor met before Tuesday's board meeting. Five of the board's nine members are on the search committee: Terrance Williams, chairman; Tomasky; Bill Heifner; Jordan A. Miller Jr.; and Elizabeth Kessler. All are members of the local business and professional community.

At the board meeting, statistics for March were released for both John Glenn Columbus International and Rickenbacker airports.

The passenger total at John Glenn Airport was up 6.3 percent last month to 670,747, despite a drop in the number of flights. That decline was partly attributable to weather and partly to the major airlines trimming schedules on a seasonal basis, according to airport spokeswoman Angie Tabor. Thousands of flights were canceled in mid-March as storms hit the East Coast and Midwest.

About 50 departures from John Glenn to East Coast airports were canceled as a result of the mid-month storms

Air Canada Express, the airport's smallest carrier, had the biggest percentage gain: a 26.2 percent increase in passengers. Southwest, Columbus' largest carrier, had a 4.8 percent gain, making it the only other airline to see passenger growth of more than 1 percent.

Rickenbacker continued to see a strong increase in cargo shipments, as the March total was up 21.3 percent from a year earlier. Allegiant Air, that airport's main scheduled passenger airline, saw a 45.5 percent increase in passengers as it added 51 percent more flights.

Separately, the airport authority could get \$227,500 to help defray costs related to last year's renaming of John Glenn Airport. That amount is in the proposed state budget. Airport officials had asked legislative leaders for financial assistance after a September study estimated total costs of about \$775,000 to change signs and marketing and administrative materials from the Port Columbus name.