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Weather station installed at Bradford County Airport available to all

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TOWANDA TOWNSHIP — The Bradford County Airport's new, automated weather station is now up and running, which provides real-time weather conditions at the airport to the public around the world, and to pilots approaching the airport.

The weather station will make it much safer for aircraft to land at the airport, said Carl Lafy, manager of the Bradford County Airport.

"This is a major improvement for the airport as far as getting air traffic in and out of here," he said.

Due to the installation of the weather station, the public and pilots can find out the weather conditions at the airport free of charge, 24/7, by going to <http://digiwx-n27.com/> on the Internet or by telephoning (570) 265-1024, Lafy said.

The weather station benefits local industries because, under FAA and company regulations, some corporate and business jets cannot land at an airport unless the airport has a certified, reportable source of weather information, such as the Bradford County Airport's newly installed weather station, said Ralph F. Petragrani, vice-president for sales and marketing at Belfort Instrument Co., the company that manufactured the new weather station.

The weather station, which cost \$69,999, was installed at the airport within the past month, he said.

Three aircraft, including a Canadair Challenger jet and a Sikorsky helicopter, all of which were carrying passengers to a funeral in Dushore, would not have landed at the airport earlier this week, if the weather station had not been there, Lafy said.

That's because there was a cloud cover at the airport, and the pilots needed data to land, such as a measurement of the visibility at the airport and the condensation altitude, which indicates the height above the ground where the base of clouds would be, Lafy said.

The Canadair Challenger is the biggest plane that ever landed at the airport, he said. Without the weather station, aircraft like the Canadair Challenger jet cannot use the airport, the airport said in a press release. The Canadair Challenger jet has a wingspan of 64 feet, is 68 1/2 feet long and 21 feet high, and seats nine to 19 people, he said.

Information generated by the weather station will also be used by the National Weather Service in Binghamton, N.Y., which will improve its forecasting for the Towanda area, Lafy said.

Among the data from the Bradford County Airport's weather station that is provided to the public and pilots are temperature, wind speed, speed of wind gusts, wind direction, dewpoint, visibility, relative humidity and barometric pressure, said Petragrani.

The weather station consists of weather instruments mounted on a 30-foot-tall mast at the north end of the airport, including a temperature/humidity probe, a wind speed sensor, a wind vane and an air pressure sensor, said Ralph F.

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Petragnani, vice-president for sales and marketing at Belfort Instrument, the company that manufactured the weather station.

Data from the mast is automatically transmitted every five seconds by a radio signal to a computer inside the airport's office, he said.

The computer contains text-to-voice software, which generates a verbal message about the weather at the airport, and that verbal message can be heard by telephoning 265-1024 or by using a radio inside an approaching aircraft, Lafy said.

The computer also uploads the weather data to the Internet.

The weather data that is accessed by calling 265-1024 or by going to <http://digiwx-n27.com/> is always less than one minute old, and it is updated 24/7, Petragnani said.

The weather station is entirely automated, so it runs 24/7 and needs no human assistance to run it, Lafy said.

"That's the big advantage of this system," said Petragnani. "No one has to be here (at the airport). No one has to report (the weather data). It does it automatically."

The weather station will make it easier for pilots to land at the airport at night or in bad weather conditions, Lafy said.

Lafy said he expects the weather station to increase the number of aircraft that will land at the airport.

The airport will also be adding in the next six to seven months a cloud height sensor, which is an instrument that will measure the height of up to four different cloud layers above the airport, and will characterize each of them as broken, scattered or overcast, Lafy said.

The Web site at which the weather data is posted also allows the public to see charts and graphs showing what the weather was like at the airport over the past 48 hours.

The \$69,999 price tag of the weather station included not only the mast and the instruments that are mounted on it, but the associated computer equipment, Petragnani said.

The airport purchased the weather station mainly using federal and state grant money, according to airport staff.

The airport's share of the cost of the weather station was \$1,750, according to airport staff.

Belfort Instrument Co.

Belfort Instrument Co., which is based in Baltimore, Md., has been in existence for more than 130 years. As a historical footnote, it built equipment that measured wind speed and direction, which was used by the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, Petragnani said.

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The image shows a banner for CCTC2me. On the left, it says "NOT Just Web Banking!" in yellow and white text. Next to it is the CCTC2me logo, which includes a blue square with a white 'C' and the text "CCTC2me" in a stylized font. Below the logo is the tagline "At the Center of Your Community" and the website "chemungcanal.com". To the right of the logo are the words "Member FDIC" and "Equal Housing Lender" with a small icon. The entire banner is repeated on the right side.