

Voyageur reaches employment milestone

by Phil Novak

The president of Voyageur Airways says his company wouldn't have been able to do worldwide business had it not been for Vic Fedeli and Air Base Property Corporation.

Max Shapiro made the statement, Fedeli at his side, while officially opening the company's structures department Thursday, where sheet metal replacement parts are repaired. He told reporters Voyageur entered a significant period of growth after entering the former Hangar 2 at what had been the airside part of CFB North Bay. As previous chairman of ABPC, Fedeli was lead negotiator in obtaining the building from the Canadian defence department.

Beyond just a regional operation

Fedeli also initiated a civil law suit against the federal government for breach of contract and settled out of court for \$3 million including costs. Much of the settlement was used to fix up buildings and infrastructure on the site. "Vic has been here with me through the whole thing," Shapiro said. "Even though we've been here in North Bay going on 30 years now, we were just an operator with a regional reach, operating aircraft."

Moving into the building at Fedeli's recommendation enabled Voyageur to expand beyond just a regional operation, Shapiro said. "We really have a world-wide reach now, and many of our customers come from foreign countries, across Canada, the United States, really basically from all over the world, so although it might not seem like it, the fact that we have the facility has created the opportunities for us which are multiplying almost daily."

Just a mess

Fedeli remembers what the hangar looked like when ABPC took it over. "The roof was sagging, the pipes had frozen and burst, it was just a mess," said Fedeli. Today, though, the hangar has been almost entirely renovated, and Shapiro announced Thursday the beginning of the final phase of repairs to the facility.

So far Shapiro has spent \$2.5 million on refurbishing the hangar since moving his business into in, also in '96. And he said more work would be starting soon. "We'll be looking at about \$350,000 over this next year, that's what we're embarking on now over the next eight to 10 months," Shapiro said. "We're looking at expanding our materials department plus the last of the major, what I call the building envelope issues, which I call the hangar door."

Sense of accomplishment

The 12.19-metre high and 30.48-metre long hangar door will be repaired and refurbished. Shapiro also announced Voyageur now employs 225 fulltime workers, compared to the 25 working in North Bay when Hangar 2 was moved into. Voyageur overhauls and repairs DASH -7 and DASH-8 aircraft. Fedeli said Voyageur's news gives him a sense of accomplishment. One of the original deal's key points called for the federal government to remediate any environmental problems left when the airside part of the base. "An elevator in Hangar 2 was removed and we found PCBs in the shaft area, so the feds came in and cleaned that up," Fedeli said.

No comparison

As ABPC chairman, Fedeli had also supervised early engineering work on the hangar door, so he knows full well what has to be done. Overall, Fedeli said, there's no comparison now to the way things used to be with the hangar. "It's so nice driving in here off Airport Road and seeing a parking lot full of cars, and knowing those cars belong to employees here, most of whom I already know," Fedeli said. "Once this was an abandoned site, but now the difference is like night and day."