

FUEL, WITH A SIDE OF CRAB

DON'T LET THE MAYBERRY RFD SETTING FOOL YOU. MARYLAND AIR IS ONE BUSY FULL-SERVICE STOP. BY CRISTINA VELOCCI



Ann Robison-Neal can remember only one time in her 15 years as manager of the Maryland Air FBO when she felt pressure. “A major corporation came in and brought seven jets,” she recalls of one particularly hectic day last summer. “That slammed us, because it was a nice day; on top of already heavy traffic, we had to service a fleet.”

Which is not to say her FBO staff typically gets to laze around. In fact, being based at Easton Airport — in the heart of Maryland’s

Eastern Shore, just an hour’s drive from both Baltimore and Washington, D.C. — means a *lot* of daily traffic. This public general-aviation airfield accommodates more than 160,000 operations a year, making it the

FILLED UP:

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state's second-busiest airport after Baltimore Washington International (BWI). Despite Maryland Air's idyllic rural setting on the edge of Chesapeake Bay, "I can't remember a time when it hasn't been busy," Robison-Neal says.

Yet this tiny hub's hub-bub doesn't faze the veterans behind the operation. A full-service FBO, Maryland Air caters to all kinds. "There is no limit to the clientele," Robison-Neal says. "You can get the elderly man who flies his little 152 in here every week to big corporate jets to military." With such a wide variety of aircraft, this FBO prides itself on service and versatility. "Whether you're an average Joe or the president of DuPont, you're guaranteed the same level of courtesy and privacy," she says.

That's necessary given the increasingly high-profile neighbors. Talbot County has become a popular weekend hotspot. Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld both have escapes from the Washington press corps nearby, and while Maryland Air doesn't talk about its customers, other sources say Harrison Ford, Vince Vaughn and any number of world leaders have been through en route to waterfront hamlets such as St. Michael's and Oxford, or the conference facilities run by the Aspen Institute just down the road.

If you stay the weekend, not only will Maryland Air fuel, service and park your aircraft (Easton's overnight tie-downs cost \$10 for a single engine, \$15 for twin and \$20 for jets), they'll also book you a hotel, rent you a car or arrange for a limo. Even if you're just stop-

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ping in for a refuel, the outfit can provide pilot weather briefing, clean your aircraft, arrange catering or simply deliver a bowl of homemade Maryland crab soup from the Hangar Café.

Partnering with Easton Aviation, a flight school and charter company, Maryland Air also offers professional air-charter services and aircraft rentals. "If someone calls looking for an aircraft we don't

CHIEF COOK AND POWER WASHER: Maryland Air offers a little bit of everything, including homemade tarmac-side crab soup.

have, we'll find it," Robison-Neal says. "The last one I got was a Gulfstream."

The Easton partnership also allows Maryland Air to offer flight training, from Private Pilot rating through advanced training. If, on the other hand, you're more the self-taught type, the FBO's Pilot Shop is chock full of airplane training materials, NOS charts and the latest Garmin GPS device.

Maryland Air has even flirted with the idea of adding a gym and a spa. "We've always been everything," Robison-Neal notes. "We've never been just a gas station." ■

410-822-0400; mdair.com