

IN FLIGHT

Denver Air Connection takes over for Boutique in Thief River Falls



Submitted photo

A Denver Air Connection jet sits on the tarmac at Thief River Falls Regional Airport on May 22. The airline brought the aircraft and crew in early for training and to become familiarized with the Thief River Falls-Minneapolis route.

By Adam Kurtz
Grand Forks Herald

Denver Air Connection has begun making flights from Thief River Falls Regional Airport to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, bringing the long process of adding the carrier to a close.

Denver Air Connection made its first flights at Thief River Falls on June 1, the first day of its two-year Essential Air Service contract. The airline took over the route from Boutique Air, which had operated flights between the two airports since 2016. Concerns about a high number of cancellations by Boutique prompted the airport manager to send a letter of concern to the U.S. Department of Transportation in September. As the contract-renewal period drew near, three additional airlines submitted bids to take over the route.

"I am very excited to have Denver Air Connection here," said Laura Stengrim, executive director of Visit Thief River Falls. "I'm very hopeful that they will restore reliable service to and from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area."

Residents and visitors have expressed positive sentiments about the airline, particularly the fact that DAC uses a larger jet in its operations, according to Stengrim. The airline is contracted to use either a 50-seat Embraer EMB-145 or a 30-seat Dornier 328. Boutique provided service with a more executive-level feel

to it, with an eight-seat Pilatus PC 12.

Flight time between Thief River Falls and Minneapolis takes an hour, and DAC offers 12 flights per week, two per day on weekdays, with one per day on the weekends. Boutique had previously offered 21 flights per week. Air travelers can expect to see higher fares with DAC over Boutique, which, on occasion, offered fares as low as \$39 to the Twin Cities. DAC's fares appear to be arranged on a tiered level, but tend to hover around \$100, sometimes climbing up to \$120 and dipping down to \$84.

Kevin Brown, vice president of brand and communications at Digi-Key Electronics, the area's largest employer, noted DAC's larger jets would benefit business travelers at his company — when they are actually able to travel. The electronics supplier has put in place a no-travel rule for employees.

"We're delighted Denver Air is taking over and providing service," Brown said. "We expect, that over the long run that will be an asset to people coming and going for business purposes."

Boutique started strong when it began in 2016, with nearly full passenger loads. The airline set new passenger records for the airport in its first four months of operations, with 4,789 passengers from July through October that year, double what the airport saw the previous year.

The airline ran into problems with a high number of flight

cancellations over the past year. The airline's reliability rating ran from percentages in the high 90s to high 70s. Shawn Simpson, CEO of San-Francisco based Boutique, traveled to Thief River Falls in October to address the problems. At that time, Simpson told the Herald cancellations stemmed from a shortage of pilots, to difficulty getting parts or spare planes to the Minneapolis airport, when repairs were necessary.

The Thief River Falls Airport Board ultimately decided to back Denver Air Connection's bid to take over the route based on its 99.6% reliability rating, as well as the increased occupancy it brings. If the airport sees more than 10,000 enplanements in a year, an extra \$1 million in federal funds would be triggered. That's little likely this year, however, as enplanements at airports across the nation are down. Due to the pandemic, only 73 passengers boarded flights at Thief River Falls in April, down from 532 in March, making June an inauspicious time for Denver Air to take over.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Essential Air Service program provides subsidies to airlines to offer service in smaller markets. The program allows people living in those areas access to the national air transportation system. Airlines bid with DOT for two-year contracts. Denver Air Connection bid nearly \$4 million for the route, \$400,000 more than Boutique.

Cookies for the Grand Forks Police Department

5 Questions for Erin Haugen

By Adam Kurtz
Grand Forks Herald

For 5 Questions this week, the Herald speaks to Erin Haugen, who runs Cookies by Erin, out of her home in Reynolds, North Dakota.

Q: Please tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to run your business.

A: I live in Reynolds with my husband and two kids, I'm a stay-at-home mom, and I've always wanted to open a bakery. This was just a way to start that I was able to do at home while my kids are young.

Q: How do customers place orders and pay?

A: I just take orders through my Facebook page or email, then I send out invoices via PayPal. Sometimes, I will do a pop-up shop. I've done them at Key Bliss Boutique. It's kind of first come, first serve and then you can pay cash there.

Q: What is unique about your cookies? What's popular?

A: They're decorated sugar cookies, each hand-decorated so they take lots of time. I make anything that someone wants, any event, any situation. Right now, graduation has been popular; otherwise, I've just been doing lots of kids birthday parties, which have been super popular. I also do holiday cookies people buy and bring to their events. For holidays, I do pre-sales, make samples and post them online. Usually during the year, I do custom orders, which are sold by the dozen. For holidays, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter and Christmas, I do more cookie gift sets, that are like sleeves of mini cookies and are a cheaper option for people to try, or give them as gifts.

Q: How do customers get their cookies, and what do you think are the challenges and merits of working out of Reynolds?

A: Cookie pick-up is in Reynolds at our house; otherwise, I do offer delivery to Grand Forks. I advertise within 30 miles of Reynolds. It's a small town so it's not convenient for people to come here all the time. It's a challenge working from home with two toddlers and myself. It's nice working from home. I can work whenever it is convenient. We love it here.

Q: What's a recent special order or project that you've done that's been unique?

A: One of the things was this last week that my girls helped me with, is we made cookies for the police department for Officer Holt. My 3 year old was super excited and she came with me to deliver them to the police department. They were mini black hearts with a blue line and then his badge number on them.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to hold hearing on Line 3 permit

By Jimmy Lovrien
Forum News Service

DULUTH — The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will hold a contested case hearing on a key water permit for Enbridge's proposed Line 3 oil pipeline later this summer. Environmental groups and Minnesota tribes requested a hearing over concerns the pipeline could harm wetlands and streams.

The contested case hearing will put the proposed 340-mile pipeline's 401 certification, a permit awarded by a state's regulators if the project's impact on water falls within the state's standards, in front of an administrative law judge to examine additional evidence and testimony on the project. Federal agencies cannot issue a federal permit or license without a state approving the 401 certification.

In February, the MPCA released a draft of the permit ahead of a public comment period and said it believed the project met the water quality rules. But on Monday, June 1, the agency said the permit's public comment period drew more than 20 requests for a contested case hearing on the permit and the agency "determined that requests related to wetlands and stream protection issues met the threshold to grant a hearing."

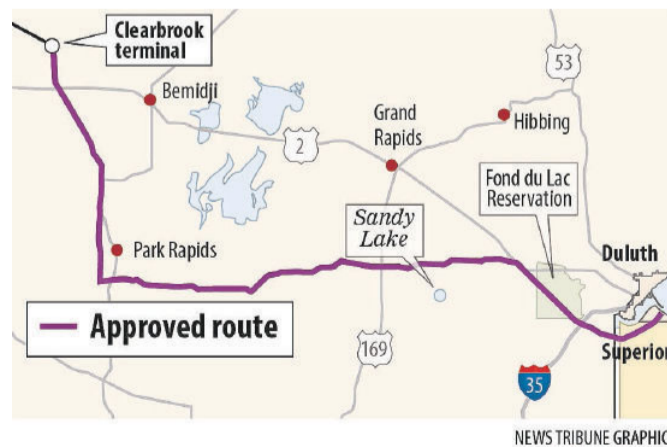
"The MPCA is committed to ensuring its 401 water quality certification provides robust and comprehensive protections to Minnesota's waters and that the agency follows all permitting requirements under the law," MPCA Commissioner Laura Bishop said in a news release Wednesday, June 3. "The contested case hearing will help

ensure the certification is protective of one of Minnesota's most important resources."

In a statement, the Sierra Club, one of the environmental groups that asked for a contested case hearing, celebrated the MPCA's decision.

"We're glad to see Laura Bishop and the PCA recognize the critical need for more analysis and public input on the threat Line 3 would pose to Minnesota's clean water," Margaret Levin, director of the Sierra Club North Star Chapter, said. "This tar sands pipeline would be a disaster for our waterways and communities, and we are confident that if the MPCA truly listens to public input and follows the science, it will be clear that the only responsible course of action is for the PCA to reject this pipeline permit once and for all."

Winona LaDuke,



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co-founder and executive director of Honor the Earth, a native-led environmental group, also applauded the decision in a statement, but said she was "dismayed" the MPCA isn't considering the impacts an oil spill from Line 3 would have on Lake Superior or wild rice.

The group is considering a "judicial appeal of the MPCA's abdication of its legal duty to pro-

tect Minnesota from oil spills," LaDuke said.

To accommodate the hearing, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers extended its deadline to Nov. 14, the final day the MPCA can make a decision on the permit under the Clean Water Act, which requires the permit to be approved or denied within one year of the application being filed. At that point, it will then be sent

to the Army Corps for final approval to ensure it meets Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Enbridge is still hoping for the "timely issuance of the remaining permits" so it can start construction on the pipeline by the end of 2020, the company said in a news release Wednesday.

"While the contested case has caused a delay to the permitting process, we believe this additional step will strengthen the MPCA's decision record," Vern Yu, Enbridge's president of liquids pipelines, said in the release. "We have planned for various permitting scenarios with the objective of accelerating and completing construction of this important safety and maintenance driven project within six to nine months after we receive final permits."

LINE 3: Page 6