

Delta Takes Off! *Additional airline enhances transportation options*

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When he last flew to Yakima, Cleveland resident Don Schjeldahl had to stop in Minneapolis and Seattle. Next time, he'll stop only in Salt Lake City thanks to Delta Air Lines, which begins service to Yakima on Thursday. As someone who's visited 49 states and 12 countries to find new locations for companies, Schjeldahl calls expanded air service a plus for a community. "When it comes to evaluating Yakima with cities it competes with for investment, it moves it up the ladder a little bit," said Schjeldahl, vice president of The Austin Co., an international site-selection consulting firm in Cleveland.

Yakima hasn't had a second air carrier since 2001, when United Express pulled out.

After years of aggressive pursuit from business and community leaders, the Atlanta-based airline will begin service from Yakima to its hub in Salt Lake City, where it flies nonstop to 112 destinations.

But Delta's arrival won't only mean more travel options — it could open the Valley to greater economic development. Air service is a critical factor for many companies when they choose a new facility site, said Angelos Angelou, president and CEO of Angelou Economics, an economic development firm in Austin, Texas. With technology such as the Internet, businesses can locate anywhere. But executives still want easy access to clients and their other offices. "When a national carrier like Delta provides these additional flights, I'm part of a national network," Angelou said. "I can be anywhere in the world in a timely fashion through one of their hubs."

And with globalization, Yakima no longer simply competes with nearby communities, such as Pendleton, Ore., or the Tri-Cities. It might compete with cities in Asia and Europe too, Schjeldahl said. "One of the things that become more important than in the past is connectivity, the ability to move people in and out quickly," he said. "And the thing that traditionally kills a market like Yakima is poor air service."

Multiple air service options have boosted economic development efforts in Redmond, Ore. Roger Lee, executive director of Economic Development for Central Oregon, said several area companies have reported reduced travel costs as air service increased. And since Delta started service from Redmond two years ago, other companies reported saving a half-day when traveling east. "If you have any degree of isolation — or even if you're not really isolated —

attracting and retaining air service is essential for healthy economic activity," Lee said.

Having several airlines also positively reflects existing economic development. Many air carriers are unwilling to spend the big dollars necessary to begin new service unless they see signs of economic vibrancy that can support it, Schjeldahl said. And Yakima's recent record-low unemployment rates and booming job and population growth are positive indicators for Delta Air Lines to begin service, Angelou said. "If (Delta) thought there was enough traffic to justify this flight, that means they like what they see in your city, your region, as far as economic development and growth," Angelou said.