

Ken Spirito Selected as Executive Director for The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport



Ken Spirito, A.A.E.

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NEWPORT NEWS - Looking to inject some new energy into growing its market share in Southeastern Virginia, the Peninsula Airport Commission on Monday named 36-year-old Ken R. Spirito as its new executive director.

Spirito, who spent the last three years in the top post of the Metropolitan Airport Authority of Peoria, Ill., will take over the lead executive position at The Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport beginning Jan. 5.

He will replace Mark Falin, the Newport News airport's manager who served as interim director after 16-year airport veteran Jim Smith resigned abruptly in June. Spirito will be paid a base salary of \$170,000.

Spirito, credited with securing funding for a new, \$65 million air terminal in Peoria that broke ground in October, will be asked to continue that growth, both in terms of securing more direct flights to more cities and building upon routes already in place, said Herbert H. Bateman, chairman of the Peninsula Airport Commission, which oversees the Newport News airport.

"Ken's got a tremendous amount of energy, and we believe he'll be able to effectively work with the FAA and public officials to secure grants and grow our air service," Bateman said. "Sure, he seems like a young guy, but he's a young guy with a lot of great experience."

Before Spirito led the General Wayne A. Downing Peoria International Airport — which ranked as the 159th busiest passenger airport in the country in 2007 — he served as assistant executive director at Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport on the Gulf Coast during Hurricane Katrina.

"He's no stranger to adversity, let's put it that way," Bateman said. "We're very, very excited for him to start and help take us forward."

In his new position, Spirito's first task is to develop new air service agreements that would increase the number of passenger and cargo flights arriving to and departing from Newport News, he said.

The key to competing with the region's other nearby airports — Richmond International and Norfolk International — will be continuing to hammer on the message of convenience and providing affordable flights, Spirito said.

He's also been asked to focus on so-called non-aeronautical revenues, which could include developing the commission's real estate holdings near the airport.

"We have to identify our opportunities to grow revenue and balance the portfolio of the airport," Spirito said. "Whether it's office parks, restaurants, corporate development, new cargo facilities — we have to be sure we're taking advantage of all our resources to keep revenue flowing."