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## York College hosts first air travel conference

By Courtney Dentch

04/03/2003

**Aviation industry professionals and academics discussed the fragile nature of the air travel business and ways to strengthen it at the first conference held by the CUNY Aviation Institute at York College Monday.**



The daylong conference at the Jamaica campus featured discussions on global, national and local air travel issues led by Port Authority of New York and New Jersey directors and professors, as well as a keynote speech by A. Bradley Mims, former deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Anthony Perl, director of the CUNY Institute of Aviation at York College, talks about ways the school can work with the aviation industry at Kennedy and LaGuardia airports.

"The health of this industry is so vital to this area," said William DeCota, director of aviation for the PA. "The health of the industry resonates through the borough of Queens as well as the city and country."

Airlines, which were already suffering from a decline in business following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, are expected to see as much as a 20 percent decrease in traffic by the end of the war in Iraq, DeCota said. When added to increased security costs and heavy federal taxes, the industry will be hard-pressed to make a speedy recovery, he said.

"Our economy is expected to lag behind the federal economy by six to eight months," he said of the aviation industry. "We are trying to equip this industry so it can continue."

The Port Authority is looking at ways to help its airline tenants at Kennedy and

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LaGuardia airports manage in these difficult times by encouraging them to reorganize their operations and pushing legislation to repeal some of the taxes, which cost passengers and airlines \$9.3 billion a year, DeCota said.

The Port Authority is also looking to the federal government for help covering additional security expenses for Kennedy and LaGuardia airports to combat terrorism, DeCota said.

"We're working to ensure our airports are the safest and most secure anywhere at all times," he said. "We want to provide a fortress-like safe haven for our passengers."

It is also crucial to Queens residents that the airports continue to thrive, DeCota said. On-airport jobs represent 9 percent of the total employment in the borough, making Kennedy and LaGuardia the second-largest employer, he said. And that does not include related off-airport jobs that support the industry, he said.

"The airports are not only staffed by neighbors but a benefit to the neighbors," he said. "We are partners in a three-legged race. We may stumble, but ultimately we will cross the finish line together and we will be victorious."

DeCota draws his confidence in part from the borough's ability to adjust to changing times, noting that more freight goods once moved on the Newtown Creek than the Mississippi River.

"The great thing about this borough is the way it's adaptable," DeCota said. "It becomes new and vibrant again."

That adaptable nature is evident in the new Aviation Institute at York College in Jamaica, which hopes to play a role in the aviation industry in Queens as well as across the nation through a bachelor's of science degree program and continuing education courses for current industry professionals, said Anthony Perl, the institute's director.

"Starting from a clean slate gives us the maximum opportunity to provide these skills," he said. "We have a chance to address these questions at a crucial time for the industry."

Perl hopes to create programs that will tailor strategic thinking and problem-solving skills to the air travel business, he said. The bachelor's courses are slated to start in September, he said.

"Skills are going to become even more important in the future," Perl said. "All areas of the industry will benefit by a highly skilled work force. We're hoping to contribute to that."

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