

## Historic flight brings hope to Columbus airport

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### **WTVM Newsleader 9**

By Laura Ann Sills -

COLUMBUS, GA (WTVM) - For the first time in 15 years, an American Airlines plane landed at the Columbus Airport. Columbus officials say traffic on the runway, thanks to the added airline, will only boost the local economy.

For 20 years, the Hatcher family has been flying from Dallas to Atlanta, only then to have to find a way to Columbus to visit grandma. When they heard about American Airlines' return to Columbus, they jumped on the first flight. "So much easier, I mean going through the Atlanta airport is terrible sometimes. It is a big nice airport, but can be delayed. It is so much easier here," said Kathy Hatcher.

With two flights in and out of Columbus each day, the economic impact is expected to be big. Airport Director Mark Oropeza said, "We are on the road to recovery. This is the return of American Airlines, they were here some 15 years ago and about 10 years ago we started trying to attract them back into the market." It is a ten year effort that airport officials' hope will get people on planes in the Fountain City. Oropeza says if people do not use the service, Columbus will lose it.

"We are able to get more passengers in and out of the market, but the nice thing for the community is you have an alternative hub." The Dallas/Forth Worth Airport is American Airlines' biggest hub. It connects to flights in 250 destinations and 40 countries.

The hope is that passengers will stay and spend money in the Valley area.

An Economic Professor at Columbus State University decided to take advantage of the flexibility on this flight, but he also gave his two cents about the economic benefits. "It will also have an impact on that short flight between Columbus and Atlanta, so that they become more competitive and it makes more sense to fly and not take the shuttle or drive to Atlanta," explained Andres Jaurequi"

Oropeza tells News Leader Nine that they are working on attracting other carriers to Columbus, like U.S. Airways that can take you to Charlotte and United Airlines to Washington D.C.

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