

# The Great New England Air Show- An Economic Impact Study



Apurv Mathur  
Deepak Ninan  
Dr. Rod Warnick  
Dr. Atul Sheel

Flint Lab, Isenberg School of  
Management  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, MA 01003

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## INTRODUCTION

Public events like air shows and fairs play a very important role in the economic and civic structure of the communities they serve. People of all ages enjoy air shows mainly due to the exhibits and the entertainment they provide. The influence of a well-organized air show enables the community to provide, to engage, and to attract visitors from a geographic region and the impact of the visitation contributes directly to the community's overall economic development.

The Westover Air Reserve Base has been in operation since 1940 and played an important role during World War II. It is the nation's largest Air Force Reserve Base, and is home to the Air Force's largest cargo aircraft, the C-5 Galaxy. More than 2,700 military and civilian workers are assigned to Westover's 439<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, a unit of Air Force Reserve Command. At present, Col. Robert R Swain Jr. is the commander of the 439<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing. The mission of the wing is to provide worldwide movement of troops, supplies, equipment and medical patients. The 337<sup>th</sup> Airlift Squadron is the wing's flying unit, and operates the C-5. The C-5 specializes in missions involving outsized and oversized cargo that no other aircraft can carry.

The mission of the United States Air Force is to fly, fight and win -- in the air, space and cyber space. Westover Air Reserve Base has been the staging location of the Great New England Air Show and its location in Chicopee, Massachusetts makes it an attractive regional destination for nearly all of New England and significant portions of New York State. The Great New England Air Show (GNEAS) has been held at this location numerous times over the past decades and has established a rich history of highly successful events.

Despite its long history, there has been no detailed attempt to understand the value of the air show's contributions to the region and what the economic impact means in quantifiable terms.

Due to the perilous times that the current economy presents, more and more people prefer to travel closer to home for a vacation or for activities together with their families. Therefore, this study was undertaken. This economic impact study was commissioned by the Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors' Bureau to essentially measure the initial economic impact that the Great New England Air Show has on the local economy and to develop a baseline of impact measures for use in future events. A secondary opportunity in this study was to measure the visitors' perceptions of the event and to conduct a rudimentary market analysis of the visitors to this event.

This report focuses on how much spending and revenues were generated by the visitors at the air show, before and after, and its impact on the community as obtained from a sample of individuals who registered at the Great New England Air Show website for the event.

The study was completed through an online survey technique where more than 1,100 individuals participated, and the use of Qualtrics™ software was employed to gather and analyze the data.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Rod Warnick, Ph.D.; Professor  
Tel: 413-545-6629 (Voice Mail)  
Email: [warnick@som.umass.edu](mailto:warnick@som.umass.edu)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **The Great New England Air Show helps boost the local economy, concludes a UMass Hospitality and Tourism Management study.**

A comprehensive research study was undertaken to understand the economic impact generated by the Great New England Air Show held at Chicopee, MA for the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors' Bureau and the Chicopee Galaxy Community Council in conjunction with University of Massachusetts Amherst's Hospitality and Tourism Management Department. The findings confirm a significant impact on the local economy with a potential to make it better through a set of recommendations.

Two graduate students from the UMass Hospitality and Tourism Management Department under the supervision of experienced faculty members conducted the study. Data were collected through intercept interviews at the event venue and through online surveys conducted by the team over a post-event, three-week period. The sample consisted of approximately 1,200 responses.

The overall economic impact of the air show on the local economy is estimated to be \$13.5 million. However, when local attendees were removed, the economic impact was still significant and estimated to be \$8.2 million. The economic impact was measured through eight (8) major spending categories and the bulk of the expenditures were for transportation costs (\$24.47 per group or 25% of the total); refreshments on site (\$20.53 per group or 21% of the total) and food purchases before or after the event (\$17.51 per group or 18% of the total). A regional multiplier of 1.5 was used in the estimates of overall impact.

An average group visiting the show consisted of approximately four (4) individuals including children. Average distance traveled one-way by visitors was 45 miles and the mean group expenditure amounted to \$98. While 65% of the visitors were between 13 and 47 years of age, 60% were highly interested in aircrafts, and 30% chose to attend as a source of family entertainment. Approximately 61% of the visitors were from outside the local area.

Overall satisfaction with the event was high (77% were satisfied or very satisfied); however, parking, access and traffic congestion were major concerns for the visitors, which were the main causes of the dissatisfaction and complaints. Of the visitors polled, 85% indicated with a high level of certainty that they would return in the next two (2) years with 57% of the sample indicating they would definitely return. Qualitative analysis of open-ended comments was compiled and a map of the visiting markets from the New England Region was presented. Nine (9) major recommendations were made on how to improve the event in the future.

The Hospitality and Tourism Management Department is an accredited program housed in the Isenberg School of Management with an enrollment of approximately 675 undergraduates and 35 graduate students. Students in the graduate program may complete a MS degree in the ISOM School. UMass Amherst, the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts system, established in 1863, has a current enrollment of 26,360 students and over 1,180 full-time faculty members.

If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Rod Warnick, Ph.D., HTM Department, please call: 413-545-6629 or e-mail at [warnick@som.umass.edu](mailto:warnick@som.umass.edu).

