

## **FlightSafety support provides citywide benefits**

By Mike Lester – Mayor, Broken Arrow  
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The question has been asked many times as to why Broken Arrow would financially assist new or expanding businesses. There are a number of reasons.

As it pertains to FlightSafety International Inc. in particular, the city will enjoy several benefits, one being the retention of 675 high-paying, quality jobs. It would take 25 to 30 years to replace that type of job, if we ever could.

Secondly, when you have that many people concentrated in one location, as FlightSafety will, it catches the eyes of restaurants, retailers and other small businesses. We will probably see five to seven new restaurants in the area over the next two years.

It will also provide the BA school system with an additional ad valorem tax base for those businesses outside the designated TIF area.

The BA City Council decides how financial benefits will provide a better quality of life for our citizens. BA, as do all of the cities in Oklahoma, depends on sales tax revenue for two-thirds of its daily operational fund. So, you can see how new businesses attracted by FlightSafety will improve the city.

We have been through extraordinary times over the past few years. It doesn't matter which of the almost 100,000 who live in the city of Broken Arrow you are; the economy has been hard on all of us. For the city, decreased revenue means holding the line on providing the opportunities we want. It means encouraging our employees to fill the gap where open spots become lost to budget cuts. But if we, as a city, can come together and create new opportunities, it will ultimately be good for everyone. The additional tax base helps a school district that is continuing to grow, and our citizens will be given new reasons to shop at home.

BA has developed a strategic plan over the past several years that deals with orderly, sustainable and practical growth, which means we are always interested in looking at the various economic opportunities available for our citizens. When you look at the new St. John Health System site, you might ask why the city would invest money in a hospital, as we surely will receive no sales tax revenue from it. But the truth of the matter is having a quality medical facility is beneficial to everyone, not only to be at ease, but also to know St. John recognizes the commitment needed to provide quality health care. The fact that there will be retail parcels throughout the front of the hospital is just icing on the cake.

The Bass Pro Shop area also continues to grow, and the city has committed to expanding Hillside Drive from Charleston's to Lynn Lane in the near future. This will provide an almost seamless flow of traffic from Aspen to County Line without ever leaving Hillside Drive. We have a new movie theater, Applebee's, our third Walmart and countless other entities in the north quadrant of the city. Once the events park has begun in the next year or so, we will probably find a real interest in locating businesses within the area for the many activities it will bring to BA.

Further down the Creek Turnpike at Aspen, we will see significant growth over the next two to three years. In fact, I predict the area will not even be recognizable in three years. So, why do we provide economic opportunities to new and expanding businesses? It's just good business.