

News Profile

Sussex County project manager Jim Hickin

Georgetown, Del., March 7, 2006: Growing up in upstate New York, Jim Hickin can remember plenty of the people and places that surrounded him in his childhood. But he can't quite remember when it was or what it was that sparked his interest in flight.

"I just liked airplanes. I can't tell you why," Mr. Hickin said. What Mr. Hickin can tell you is that childhood curiosity has given him a fulfilling career, first as an aeronautical engineer, then an Air Force pilot, and now as the Sussex County Engineering Department's project manager for the growing Sussex County Airport.



Jim Hickin

Mr. Hickin is one of Sussex County government's newest employees, recruited last year as part of an effort to bring in more skilled professionals with expertise in a variety of fields, both in the private and public sectors.

Since starting in June 2005, Mr. Hickin has flown into a number of projects for the Engineering Department, from shepherding a project to write a master growth plan for the Georgetown-area airport for the next 20 years to spearheading a project that will extend by 1,000 feet the airport's primary runway. That project, part of \$35 million in planned improvements in the next five years, is to be completed by 2009.

"There's a lot going on there at one time," Mr. Hickin said. "I think it's important to have someone's attention focused on the airport full time."

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Mr. Hickin spent quite a bit of his career flying the jumbo C-5 cargo planes for the Air Force, and then commercial airlines after his military retirement. So it might seem unusual to some that he would be attracted to a job managing engineering projects.

"I needed a job, and I saw the ad on the Internet," Mr. Hickin jokes. Actually, in 2005, he was furloughed in a corporate downsizing by the airline for which he worked. Now looking for a job, he eventually came upon the opportunity with Sussex County.

Name: James A Hickin
Age: 49
Residence: Milford
Occupation: Project Manager, Sussex County Engineering Department
Responsibilities: Oversees capital projects at the Sussex County Airport, including a planned runway expansion and hangar construction; Sussex County's lead employee on the development of an airport master plan
Background: Retired in 2000 as a Lt. Col. from the United States Air Force, having performed a variety of duties, from aircraft design engineering to managing investigations at the Pentagon; worked as a commercial airline pilot after retirement
Education: undergraduate aerospace engineering degree from Syracuse University in New York; master's degree in aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida

"Actually, this was the kind of job I was looking for. It had to do with airports and airplanes, and with a bit of an engineering background and some experience with project management later on in my career with the Air Force, it just seemed like a good fit," Mr. Hickin said.

Mr. Hickin has been a good fit, said County Engineer Michael Izzo.

"He's got the aviation background, he understands the terminology, he's up to date on the latest federal regulations, and he understands what components at the airport are important for us to maintain and improve upon," Mr. Izzo said.

Mr. Izzo said the position Mr. Hickin holds now had been more engineering-oriented prior to his hiring, while today it's more management-based. By shifting the focus of the position from one in which the occupant actually designs projects to one who manages them, Mr. Izzo said that ensures "we don't let things fall through the cracks."

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This is the first in an occasional series of profiles about some of the newest members of Sussex County government.