

Valeria Fernandez

Op-Ed writing sample

Aviation is the core of Savannah's economic success

Nicknamed the “Hostess City of the South,” Savannah loves the opportunity to share our area with visitors from all over the world, and we care deeply about the experience they have beginning the moment they arrive at our airport.

The aerospace/aviation industry in Savannah represents an important pillar that sustains our region's economy and is interconnected with our tourism, national defense, advanced manufacturing and logistics industries, all supported by a myriad small businesses. Whether coming to experience our coastal landscapes and learn about our rich history or using our airport to reach our neighboring coastal communities, visitors remember the special and unique nature of our region.

Savannah is a worldwide destination, and more than 27,000 of our neighbors work in visitation-related jobs. Many of those jobs become careers, as waiters become general managers and tour guides become small-business owners. There is something very special about the hospitality industry — virtually every “leader” that you run into started at an entry-level position and worked his or her way up.

Given our city's position on the world stage, the Savannah Hilton Head International Airport has expanded to meet the growing demand of incoming passengers. The build out is already paying off; in 2012, the airport sold more than [20 thousand seats a week](#) and had 11 nonstop destinations and six major markets. By 2021, seat capacity rose to more than 50,000 per week on 31 nonstop destinations. Recently, the airport started to service 36

nonstop flights and saw a peak of 1.9 million passengers. This connectivity is a real benefit for those of us who live here and travel frequently.

Savannah is proud to be home to [Hunter Army Airfield](#), the Army's Premier Power Projection Platform on the East Coast, which is responsible for training, equipping and deploying Army units. The location plays a significant role in deployment capabilities. HAAF has a landing facility for the largest military aircraft, and the capability of loading the biggest equipment in the Army inventory is possible. The [Air Dominance and Combat Readiness Training Center](#) is an Air National Guard Base worth recognizing for its efforts to train those who keep our skies safe. Setting clear missions to keep our air space safe also fosters an attractive asset for business and the aerospace industry overall.

Savannah is an ideal aerospace supplier hub, strategically positioned close to Gulfstream and within 100 miles of Boeing in Charleston, and 140 miles of Embraer in Jacksonville. Gulfstream designs, develops, manufactures, markets and services the best and most advanced business jets in the world, all from right here in our hometown. The company recently announced it is committing to a \$98.5 million expansion in facilities and adding 1,600 more jobs than the already employed 11,500 staff. Since 1958, the company has produced more than 2,000 aircraft.

Along with the state of Georgia and the Savannah Economic Development Authority, we have made attracting and retaining aerospace jobs and investment as one of our top priorities. When the aviation industry grows, the ripple effect can be easily seen throughout our entire economy. Now is the time for our federal, state and local elected officials to continue their support in further establishing our aviation sector as a central hub.

We shouldn't take our safe skies for granted, and we are lucky to have such a wide range of opportunities for the aerospace industry to continue its steady growth. Undoubtedly, Savannah is a proud supporter of aviation, and you should be, too.