



DETROIT METRO • WILLOW RUN
WAYNE COUNTY AIRPORT AUTHORITY

L.C. Smith Terminal • Mezzanine
Detroit, MI 48242
ph 734 942 3550
fax 734 942 3793
www.metroairport.com

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Contact: Michael Conway (734) 942-3558

Scott Wintner (734) 955-3745

Airport Authority Announces Leadership Changes

-- Genelle Allen to become Interim CEO effective July 1

Genelle Allen, Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA) Executive Vice President, has been tapped to lead Michigan's busiest airport system and one of the world's premier air transport hubs as the Airport Authority's Interim CEO. Her appointment, which was approved unanimously by the WCAA Board at its regular meeting this week, is effective July 1.

Ms. Allen will assume the role from Lester Robinson, who has served as WCAA CEO since the Authority's inception in 2002 and as Wayne County Director of Airports since 2000. In a separate action, the Board also approved a one-month extension of Mr. Robinson's contract through June 30.

"All of Southeast Michigan has benefited tremendously from Lester Robinson's leadership of transforming our region's airports – a key economic engine – from some of the worst in the nation to among the best in the world," said WCAA Board Chair Charlie Williams shortly after the vote. "The Board is confident that Genelle will continue to build upon that foundation as we complete a national search for a permanent CEO."

Allen, a Detroit native, joined the Airport Authority upon its founding in 2002 as Senior Vice President for Procurement & Strategy Management, having served as part of the Airports' legal team as Supervisory Assistant Corporation Counsel for Wayne County since 1997. In that role, Allen was one of the primary authors of the Authority's first Procurement and Contracting Ordinance. She was the driving force behind the development of a new Small Business Enterprise (SBE) program to engage more local, small enterprises in business opportunities at the airport, and has spearheaded a complete reengineering of the Authority's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program.

In 2009, Allen was promoted to her current role as Executive Vice President, under which her scope of responsibility has grown to include oversight of Willow Run Airport and Authority Affairs.

Prior to her work at Wayne County's airports, Allen served as Supervising Assistant Corporation Counsel of the Municipal Affairs Section for the City of Detroit. From 1991-1994, she also

served as Assistant Director of Law for the City of Cleveland, Ohio, overseeing the city's municipal law section (which included the city's two airports).

Mr. Robinson has been in charge of Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW) and Willow Run Airport since April 2000 when he was tapped to become Wayne County's first African-American Director of Airports. In December 2002, when the airports transitioned to the new Wayne County Airport Authority, the WCAA Board appointed Mr. Robinson as its first Chief Executive Officer. During Robinson's tenure, DTW opened two new terminals and its sixth runway, propelling DTW to its current position as first in airport satisfaction among large airports in North America by JD Power and Associates.

"Having served under Lester and having been part of the success he has fostered, it is a tremendous honor to follow in his footsteps and lead the talented group of professionals who operate and maintain Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run Airports—two of our region's most vital economic assets," said Allen. "Lester will be greatly missed at the Authority and the legacy of his transformative leadership will remain for generations."

As CEO, Mr. Robinson's strong focus was to run an efficient and convenient airport while keeping costs as low as possible for the airlines. His goal was to operate the airports more like a business and less like a government department.

"When airlines are shopping for an airport, whether they are new low-fare carriers or legacy carriers already serving the market, they look at several factors," said Robinson. "Strength of the market and geographic location are certainly important, but cost per enplaned passenger for operating at that airport is a key component. If you don't keep your costs in line, your customers will begin losing routes—and eventually airlines."

Mr. Robinson arrived at the airports with more than 25 years of experience as an accountant and financial manager for government, banking and financial services organizations. He was President and CEO of First Independence Corporation, Chief Financial Officer and Chief of Staff for the Office of the Wayne County Executive. In the early 1990's, Mr. Robinson served a two-year stint as Deputy Director of Airports and made it a priority to teach airport supervisory employees budget skills. A 1998 winner of Crain's Black Business Leadership Award, Mr. Robinson was named Airport Director of the Year by Airport Revenue News in 2006.

His reputation for fiscal integrity reached as far as Lansing when Governor Engler appointed Mr. Robinson to serve on a review team working with a financially troubled community from 1996 to 1999.

Mr. Robinson served on the Board of Directors for Airports Council International-North America from 2007 to 2010, as well as the Policy Review Committee for the American Association of Airport Executives. He also is a long-time member of the Oakwood Hospital Board of Trustees.

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