


The Path to Privatizing Commercial Cargo- Specific Airports

Airglades International Airport:
A Case Study in Success

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SOCIETY OF INDUSTRIAL AND OFFICE REALTORS®
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"... if approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), [Airglades International Airport] would be the first airport of its kind in the continental United States upon opening in 2020."



Graphic Courtesy of AIA

On August 31, 2017, a group of graduate students, faculty, local commercial real estate business men and women, and economic development professionals – about 75 altogether – gathered in Nova Southeastern University’s Carl DeSantis Building in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to celebrate the winners of the 2017 Challenge Grant competition. Hendry County administrator, Charles Chapman, two senior officials from SIOR Global and four SIOR Foundation Trustees were also in attendance.

The stars of the event were clearly the students. Some were recent graduates from Nova Southeastern University’s H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship and had earned Masters of Science in Real Estate Development (MSRED) degrees, while others were currently attending the executive-style masters’ program on weekends. All of them were young adults in their mid-to-late 20s and 30s. The ceremony for the working graduates meant that after nearly two decades of schooling, a chapter of their lives was closing and fulltime adulthood was just beginning.

The subject of the evening was the proposed Airglades International Airport (AIA) project, a privatized commercial cargo project that, if approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), would be the first airport of its kind in the continental United States upon opening in 2020.

There are hundreds of airports in the U.S. and pretty much all of them receive and send cargo, both nationally and internationally. All of them, with perhaps an exception or three, are owned by either the local municipality or a special-purpose entity associated with a municipality. Airports are big business. In fact, in many communities, the local airport can be among the biggest economic drivers to their respective economies and are often among the largest local employers.

There are also many U.S. airports in which passenger traffic is relatively light compared with nearby primary

metro-market airports, so these airports rely on cargo as a primary revenue generator. A perfect example is Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD), which despite having many flights to popular “snowbird” destinations, relies on its big cargo business as a primary revenue source.

According to the cargo page from RFD’s website, “RFD offers significant advantages to Air Cargo Carriers and Air Freight Forwarders. Cargo Airlines using RFD save fuel, save time, and save money. Independent airspace assures direct in approaches. Surrounded by expressways running north, south, east and west, RFD has excellent accessibility for speedy road feeder services. A U.S. Customs Port, RFD offers fabulous modern facilities, long runways, Category II/III Instrument Landing System and low cost rent and landing fees. All of this can result in savings of millions of dollars yearly.”

Many people would consider Chicago Rockford to be a so-called “reliever” airport to O’Hare International.



*2017 Challenge Grant Competition
Ft. Lauderdale Fla. / Photo by Gary Marsh*



The Case for a Specialized South Florida Cargo Airport Takes Shape

Some people contend that Miami International Airport (MIA) has so much demand for both passenger and cargo flights that the airport is at, or will soon reach, capacity. Further, adjacent or nearby real estate for commercial-industrial properties associated with cargo transfer is both expensive and time-consuming to access – from and to the airport – because of vehicular traffic and roadway congestion.

The following is from MIA's website:

Miami International Airport, located on 3,230 acres of land near downtown Miami, is operated by the Miami-Dade Aviation Department and is the property of Miami-Dade County government. Founded in 1928, MIA now offers more flights to Latin America and the Caribbean than any other U.S. airport, is one of America's busiest airports for international passengers, boasts a lineup over 100 air carriers and is the top U.S. airport for international freight. MIA is also the leading economic engine for Miami-Dade County and the state of Florida, generating business revenue of \$30.9 billion annually and welcoming 60 percent of all international visitors to Florida. MIA's vision is to grow from a recognized hemispheric hub to a global airport of choice that offers customers a world-class experience and an expanded route network with direct passenger and cargo access to all world regions.

MIA and related aviation industries contribute 270,681 jobs directly and indirectly to the local economy.

MIA also ranks No. 1 among all U.S. airports for international freight and 4th for cargo. In 2017, it took in over 1.9 million tons of international freight and more than 310,000 tons in domestic cargo.

Located in rural Hendry County, an agricultural community about 80 miles northwest of Miami and about 53 miles east of Fort Myers, Airglades Airport was established in 1942 to aid the war effort and was used primarily for training flights by U.S. and British aviators. The current airport serves recreational pilots and a skydiving school 5 miles west of Clewiston, which is near Lake Okeechobee.

The largest landowners in Hendry County are U.S. Sugar and Hilliard Brothers of Florida as sugar cane, citrus, and cattle are the area's primary revenue sources. Airglades Airport is about one hour from Interstate 75 (northbound) via both Florida State Highways 82 and 80. Highway 27 goes south from Clewiston to Palm Beach and eventually become Le Jeune Road in Miami. Clewiston is the largest city in Hendry County with an estimated (2015) population of 7,505.

"That's how it got started for specialized cargo into Miami," said Fred Ford, President of AIA. "I calculated that shippers would save \$400 in gasoline, or the equivalent of one roundtrip per truck, if that cargo could land at Airglades instead and effectively give those products a 100-mile head start to their end destinations. Just as significantly, flying into Hendry County could save two or three hours of the truck drivers' time."

Ford's idea to turn Airglades Airport into Airglades International Airport is an exercise in patience.

After leaving Raytheon Corporation/Washington Group International in 2007 with "a decent retirement package but no golden parachute," the Massachusetts-based aviation



Graphic Courtesy of AIA

consultant started advising aviation-oriented enterprises, including clients in Korea, Serbia, Nigeria, and Florida. The airport management veteran was doing some research for a client that wanted to develop a new airport, so Ford, who technically got his start in aviation in 1967, asked himself what kind of airport he would build if given a blank canvas.

"I can tell you what airport managers' worry about," he said, "airport managers worry about what happens when they run out of land — they run out of revenue."

The client project was unrelated to AIA, yet it was during that work that Ford recognized MIA's growth challenges and concurrently "discovered" the sparsely used airport up in Hendry County. "This dynamic is very similar to the Chicago O'Hare to Rockford situation where lots of activity did not need to be at O'Hare," Ford said. "There was the United Parcel service hub where the UPS freighters did not interact with the passenger aircraft. Also, the fleet of KC-135 (B-707) aircraft and hangars of the Air National Guard occupied valuable land but produced little revenue compared to the airline passenger volumes."

The Unintended Consequences of MIA's Success = Bottlenecks with Negative Impacts to the Global Supply Chain

From 2010 through 2015, passenger traffic at MIA increased 24 percent. In 2017, the airport ranked 3rd for the most international passengers and 12th among all U.S. airports in total passengers, taking in 44.1 million of them, according to MIA's website. Its weekly average was 838,633 passengers. By comparison, New York's John

F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) airport handled 59.3 million passengers in 2017 while the world's busiest airport, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport had 103.9 million passengers boarding or exiting planes last year, according to Statista – The Statistics Portal.

In an April 26, 2018 press release, MIA reported "MIA passenger, cargo traffic has fast start in 2018." Here is a portion of the announcement:

"Miami International Airport got off to a strong start in 2018 with a 3.79-percent increase in passenger traffic and four-percent growth in freight tonnage through March, compared to the same period last year. International travelers rose 4.64 percent to 5.5 million passengers, while domestic traffic increased 3 percent to six million passengers, for a total of 11.5 million travelers at MIA in the first quarter. International freight traffic rose 1.8 percent to 491,264 tons and domestic freight jumped 19.1 percent to 84,180 tons, for a combined 575,444 tons through March."

In the 10-year period from 2006 to 2016, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reported that average taxi times for airplanes at MIA increased 25 percent. Additionally, the success of MIA accelerated its operational challenges. In fact, the Florida Airport System Plan (FASP) 2025 has projected that MIA as an airport will exceed 100 percent of its operational capacity by 2040. That is the airport bottleneck.

Space is at a premium at Miami International Airport, which includes various built-out aprons and warehouses for processing cargo. The majority of cargo-processing facilities serving MIA, however, is not on airport property at all. Rather, they are within a few miles of the airport, which during commute times can easily take 30 minutes or longer for trucks to move cargo from the airport to distribution facilities. That is the ground transportation bottleneck.

A South Florida commercial real estate broker reported that climate-controlled warehouse and distribution space near Miami International is commanding \$12-\$14 (net) per square foot – high by historical standards as well as higher than leasing rates for standard Class A distribution facilities further away from the airport, which currently run between \$8 and \$9 per square foot.



Miami addressed its traffic situation with a \$176 million project that built an elevated roadway to allow efficient flow of cargo trucks from the west cargo facilities at MIA to either Palmetto Expressway or into the community of Doral. Dubbed the 25th Street Viaduct Program, the cargo-only roadway opened in August 2016 and has been well received by shippers and Florida transportation planners, yet Ford asserts it is not enough, at least for the type of cargo he envisions for AIA.

Officials from Miami International Airport assert that the airport has plenty of capacity and do not believe the idea for AIA has much merit. A representative from Miami-Dade Aviation Department emailed this response after being contacted for this report:

"Miami-Dade Aviation Department staff have met with Airglades International Airport, LLC (AIA) representatives on various occasions to discuss the Airglades Airport concept, and has met separately with Florida Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration staff on the same matter. During these meetings, MDAD has clearly outlined why it believes that AIA's proposed cargo hub would not work in Clewiston, Florida. Consequently, MDAD does not support or endorse the development of Airglades into a cargo hub. Miami-Dade County is already served by a system of other County airports that provide a reliever function to MIA and, because of their proximity to MIA, are better positioned to provide these functions to MIA if such needs arise. MDAD has had the opportunity to clearly outline why it believes that separating or segmenting the existing perishables operation at MIA to a secondary or reliever airport will not be viable."

MIA's statement continued:

"Consequently, MDAD does not support, need, nor is it seeking Airglades as a reliever to MIA. With approximately 3.9 million square feet of warehouse/cargo handling space, MIA is not experiencing any cargo capacity shortages. MDAD continues to closely monitor cargo activity growth, as well as the processing capacity of our cargo facilities. Additionally, there is a master plan process under way that will help Miami-Dade County define near-term and

long-term cargo handling facility needs, and ensure MIA's ability to continue being an international air cargo leader. MIA continues to be America's busiest airport for perishable freight, handling more than 62 percent of all U.S. perishable air imports."

The Perishable Goods Supply Chain

“We’re not trying to build an airport to compete with Miami International,” Ford says, “rather, we are building an airport to serve a unique community – the perishable goods supply chain,”

According to Ford’s research, 74 percent of U.S. airborne perishable product is supplied through Latin America, most of which is flown into MIA. The U.S. has increased food imports by air 49 percent in the last decade (all ports of entry) and the growth in food imports to MIA grew 41 percent during that span. Astoundingly, 93 percent of the fresh cut flowers are primarily shipped from Columbia and Ecuador to Miami for distribution throughout the U.S. and Canada.

“In addition to flowers, we’re focused on building a world-class facility to handle fresh fish and crustaceans from Latin America, as well as fragile fruits and vegetables, such as papaya, mangos, and asparagus,” Ford said. “Asparagus is very fragile and loses its value if the tips are damaged (that’s why asparagus is almost always shipped by air versus ocean).”

“Today, 1.2 billion pounds of perishable goods arrive in MIA each year,” Ford continued. “To land that amount of tonnage, it takes fewer than 60 flights, but you can’t finance an airport on 60 flights. The perishable goods will help finance AIA, yet landing fees will only be part of the equation even if the perishable goods industry continues to grow annually by five or six percent, as it has for years.”

For AIA to pencil out as a business, speed and value are essential to the process. For financing to be completed for the airport, it will have to secure several anchor tenants

(growers), just as most commercial real estate developers would need to do in order to secure financing prior to construction.

"From the time flowers are picked until they arrive at your grocery store for purchase, they must be maintained around 34 degrees. Eliminating 'touches,' or the amount of times product is moved, plus limiting the time product is on airport tarmacs and getting that product to processing facilities as quickly as possible creates value," Ford said. "Another element to value is shelf life. If a grocer can keep Chilean Sea Bass on his shelves an extra day, that adds tremendous value to the seller and shipper."

Loss prevention is a big motivator for growers. He estimates that globally, annual flower losses are around 32 percent during shipment, though less at Miami International because of proximity to South America.

"Refrigerated facility rents may be higher at AIA, yet even so, we calculate – and these numbers have been vetted by (flower) growers themselves – growers and shippers would save between 15 and 30 percent annually by sending their goods to AIA," Ford said.

The business plan for AIA includes a "one-stop shop" feature for growers and shippers. The airport would be designed to accommodate U.S. Customs, DEA, Agriculture and TSA agents on-site and under one roof. Further, the airport would be promoted as a cheaper and faster place for private jets to fly in and out of the Caribbean and refuel. Currently, the majority of that aviation traffic goes to and from Palm Beach International Airport, which is 70 miles east of Airglades Airport.

Passing Technical Elements and Milestones to Build a Public/Private Airport

In 2010, Fred Ford approached the Hendry County Board of County Commissioners to create a perishable air cargo complex at Airglades Airport.

He knew that in 1997, Congress established the FAA's Airport Privatization Pilot Program (APPP) to explore privatization as a means to generate access to private capital for airport improvement and development. Under the APPP, the FAA was authorized to permit public airport sponsors to sell or lease an airport to exempt the sponsor from certain federal requirements.

AIA was formed by Florida Cargo Fresh, a business Ford created in 2010 specifically to operate in Hendry County. In early 2012, his company joined up with U.S. Sugar and Hilliard Brothers of Florida. "This union of growers, cool-chain experts, adjacent land owners, and logistics-savvy partners created a 'dream team' for the Airglades project," Ford added. "The composition of the AIA team could not be better."

When AIA gets final permits and funding, Hendry County plans to transfer ownership of Airglades Airport to AIA under the auspices of the FAA Airport Privatization Pilot Program. Airglades is the only airport in the program that can be sold by the government entity owner (Hendry County) to a private developer.

The first steps AIA and Hendry County undertook were to have an Environmental Assessment for the new airport created after review by the Environment Protection Agency under guidelines established in the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act. In October 2017, Hendry County received an EPA finding that the proposed airport had no significant impact, comments, or restrictions with the environmental process.



In government agency speak, that means an approval to proceed.

From 2008 to 2011, initial funding for preliminary development came from Ford and his partners, and through late 2016, over \$10 million had been invested in the airport's development. In October 2017, however, Florida Governor Rick Scott's office (technically SB 10, the Florida legislature) awarded Hendry County \$1 million for further planning and development of AIA. Those funds are earmarked for hiring an engineering firm. Bids have been received by Hendry County and work was expected to start by summer 2018, according to Hendry County Administrator Charles Chapman IV.

A subsequent round of funding, this time for \$1.5 million, came from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. Those funds are specific to converting and expanding the existing airport facility to create a hospitality suite for pilots, as well as offices to accommodate up to 50 U.S. Customs agents.

Chapman said the county is currently leading public outreach meetings to determine land uses within 15.5 miles to the airport and particularly scrutinizing the area within a 2.5 mile radius of AIA. Noise contours, environmental assessments, and related elements are being evaluated. The goal, said Chapman, is to present the Hendry County board with two options for a final land use plan for the design teams to follow prior to construction.

In addition to building new facilities and an airport control tower, construction plans call for upgrading and paving the existing 6,000-foot runway and building a new 10,000-foot runway for the larger planes.

The FAA will ultimately determine to what extent it might contribute financially to the project for airport infrastructure that is specific to the public use aviation components at AIA.

The total tab to build the 3,000 acre AIA is expected to be between \$500 million and \$650 million, which will include temperature controlled and refrigerated warehouse and distribution facilities, runway taxi areas and tarmac space for parking a contemporary fleet of commercial airplanes, maintenance facilities, fueling facilities, and other airport-related requirements.

Concurrent with sourcing multiple construction packages, issuing RFPs and evaluating bids, AIA developers and Hendry County officials will need to secure instrument approach procedures for the new runway from the FAA, as well as have the runway officially commissioned by the FAA before the airport opens. Chapman said they are still on track for a potential late 2019 opening or in the first half of 2020.

The SIOR Sponsored Challenge Grant and Student Involvement

Located a few miles west of downtown Fort Lauderdale, Fla., within Broward County, the H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) is one of approximately 50 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada that The Society of Industrial and Office REALTORS® (SIOR) financially supports through scholarship grants, challenge grants, advanced research work, and career development programs through the SIOR Foundation (a separate 5013c from SIOR Global, the world's leading international association of commercial real estate professionals).

NSU's Master of Science in Real Estate Development (MSRED) program (www.nova.edu/realestate) created three teams of four students, each under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Wuerzer, associate professor of real estate development, to develop design concepts associated with ancillary land uses, creating amenities and related development on property immediately adjacent to AIA.

Here is the description of the Problem Statement associated with the Challenge Grant and the Scope of work expected from the student teams.

Problem Statement: FAA funding must be used for airport infrastructure only (runways, towers, etc.) and cannot be used for construction of on-airport support facilities, such as freezer/cooler facilities or logistics buildings. Hendry County

does not have the infrastructure in place (water, sewer, electric, etc.) to support the types of industrial and service uses that will be required in and around the airport, and has not established funding mechanisms for their development. Further, the County does not have comprehensive land use regulations in place, and would like to establish a “roadmap” for the future. The cost of a comprehensive study by a civil engineering consultant is not something they can ask their taxpayers to fund at this time. However, the President of AIA, along with the County’s Chief Administrator, Commissioners, Economic Development Director, and Planning and Community Development Director, feel a study by a third party with no vested interests could be extremely advantageous. They are very excited to have a study done by the Masters students at Nova.

Scope: This project shall have two priority zones: Zone 1 is the immediate airport land area and its development. Zone 2 comprises adjacent properties, including the services needed to operate the airport, such as utilities, industry and infrastructure. Students shall explore and investigate ideas and opportunities that support smart real estate development and planning. Whereas Zone 1 can be seen as a site planning and real estate development approach, work done on both zones shall encompass the character of a draft master plan. This includes, but is not limited to, discussion of limitations and constraints that might exist or could occur while realizing the airport expansion and support structure, as well as raising critical questions that need answers for successful and meaningful surrounding development in the near future.

“Each of the teams produced these little gems during the competition and even if a team didn’t win, the judges liked the combination of ideas generated by the teams,” said Dr. Wuerzer.

One team explored a second 10,000-foot runway for expansion plans, while another considered the need for commercial and industrial facilities near the airport, and even residential development closer to Clewiston. The third team conceived of a “Truckopolis,” or super-sized truck stop with lots of amenities, Wuerzer added.

The judging of the competition was performed by the clients (AIA + Hendry County); SIOR representative Ted Konigsberg,

SIOR; and Professor Wuerzer. Students from the winning and second-place teams received scholarship grants as part of the competition. The SIOR Foundation and SIOR Florida Chapter provided \$20,000 for the scholarships and hosted a reception that followed the awards ceremony.

“The greatest value for design and challenge competitions is that it is experiential learning, which is required and part of our curriculum, yet there is also team-based learning and collaboration, which is real-world experience for our students. Further, Challenge Grant competitions are excellent resume builders,” said the professor.

The SIOR Florida Chapter Challenge Grant program was initiated a few years ago by Ted Konigsberg, SIOR, president of Infinity Commercial Real Estate based in Miami Lakes, Fla., and Dr. Fred Forgey, director of the Master of Science in Real Estate Development (MSRED) Program at the H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship.

The first challenge at NSU was held in 2015. The SIOR Florida Chapter, led by Ted Konigsberg, partnered with DCT Industrial and created a challenge in which graduate students helped design a 400,000-square-foot industrial facility in the South Florida market. For 2019, the SIOR Florida Chapter has decided to sponsor the University of Florida’s Masters in Real Estate Program in Gainesville, which has an ongoing development competition for its graduate students to engage with local developers. However, Konigsberg is confident that SIOR will return to NSU.

“The relationship we established at Nova was so meaningful there is no doubt in my mind we will do programs with them in the future,” he said.



Next Steps to Build the Airport and Clewiston's Expected Growth

In an e-mail reply, Tuesday Tritt, board president of the Hendry County Economic Development Office, said the original master plan for the city in 1922 called for an estimated population of 25,000. The city currently has about 8,000 people living within the city limits and 15,000 counting the surrounding area, so there is room for growth. The county and city are working on joint applications for infrastructure improvements for sewer. South Shore Water Association via the City of Clewiston plant already delivers potable water and has capacity. Glades Electric supplies power and also has capacity.

In addition to large landowners U.S. Sugar and Hilliard Brothers, "there are many other private landowners in the Airglades area that will welcome the opportunity to speak to interested parties for industrial, commercial, and residential developments," Tritt continued. "We hope there will be great demand for residential homes in Clewiston. Our location on Lake Okeechobee and equal distance to the east and west coasts of Florida makes Clewiston a great place to call home."

For AIA to become a reality, it has to simultaneously raise several hundreds of millions in capital to finance the construction and convince some of the largest flower and perishable food growers to commit to either long-term leases or to build their own facilities at the Hendry County Airport.

Ford has said AIA needs at least 25 to 35 percent of the perishable market from South America to underwrite the project yet prefers 50 percent for starters.

"Once we get a few early commitments, I am confident others will follow and relatively quickly, he said. "We've already received inquiries from a Jamaica grower that wasn't even on our radar."

As for investors, he thinks they will come to the table, also.

"Frankly, AIA has been pleasantly surprised by the quality and quantity of interest from the investment community that participates in airport funding," said Ford.

He has relationships with lenders throughout the world and said preliminary interest is coming from both domestic and offshore sources. He cited Europe and Australia in particular.

"Financing could be in the form of a total investment, debt financing or possibly a combination of debt and equity. Interest is high because of Airglades' location. The FAA has been keen on a reliever airport to come along for Miami International for some time," he said.

Ford has the street cred for funding airports. He was part of the management team that raised \$970 million to capitalize and build the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport when it was an open prairie. DFW opened in 1974. Ford was the General Manager of the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport from 1972 to 1978.

Ford also has a significant personal stake in seeing AIA open. He has invested 10 years of his career and his entire Raytheon/Washington Group retirement package into its creation.

If the stars align to get the airport across the finish line, ultimately, the new cargo-specific airport would feature state-of-the-art warehouses and distribution facilities designed specifically for perishable goods. The modern logistics and supply chain features should significantly lower the cost of delivery from the original sources of those goods to various points-of-purchase locations throughout the U.S. and Canada. When built, AIA would be the first FAA-approved and privatized commercial cargo airport to operate in the United States.

"A long time in the making," Ford says, "Airglades International Airport is a one-of-a-kind type of project, yet it has far-reaching impacts in the transportation industry."

Gary Marsh is a principal of Marsh Marketing and partner in Pipkin Marsh Advisors. A former business journal reporter, magazine writer and corporate communications team member with Cushman & Wakefield, the SIOR Associate Member and SIOR Foundation Trustee started writing when he covered the 1967 World Series for his 5th grade class.

Resources

- Airglades International Airport LLC
- Charles Chapman IV, Hendry County (Florida) Administrator
- FAA Aviation System Performance Metrics
- FAA Operational Network
- Frederick C. Ford, AEA, President of Airglades International Airport LLC
- Ted Konigsberg, SIOR, SIOR Foundation Trustee and the President of Infinity Commercial Real Estate based in Miami Lakes, Fla.
- Miami International Airport (website)
- Miami-Dade Aviation Department
- Tuesday Tritt, Board President of the Hendry County Economic Development Office. She is also Vice President and Branch Manager in the LaBelle office of First Bank
- Dr. Thomas Wuerzer, associate professor of Master of Science in Real Estate Development (MSRED) program at Nova Southeastern University's H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship



Frederick C. Ford, AEA and now 71, started in the aviation business 52 years ago. He grew up in Boston, his parents' home only 1,800 feet from the end of the runway at Boston Logan International Airport. In 1967, newspapers all over America were running stories about The Boeing Company's plan to launch a new airplane, the 747 jumbo jet. Of particular concern was the expectation

that the new aircraft would generate four times the noise of the smaller 707 series jets.

Nineteen-year-old Ford started doing research on Boeing's new plane, writing letters to the aircraft company and related suppliers. He got responses to his inquiries and took his findings to the Massachusetts Port Authority. The Boeing 747-100 jumbo jet took to the sky for the very first time on February 9, 1969. With that event, commercial air travel changed forever.

The Massachusetts Port Authority hired the young Ford as a trainee where he worked his way up to Operations Supervisor before taking another job at the startup Dallas/Fort Worth Airport in 1972. He would return to the Port Authority, however, and was Director of Aviation/COO from 1978 to 1980 when he returned to DFW to develop the Northeast Cargo Center for UPS and FedEx.

From 1984 to 1987 Ford was Vice President of Aviation Services for Pan American World Airways and CEO of Pan Am Management Systems, Pan Am Helicopters and Pan Am's Alert Management Systems.

He then moved to Chicago, taking the post of Executive Director and CEO for the Chicago-Rockford Port Authority. It was at this reliever airport to Chicago's O'Hare that he took a deeper dive into cargo and freight-forwarding businesses at commercial airports. When he arrived in 1988 the airport had one regional airline. When he left, RFD was the second largest hub in the United Parcel Service Airlines system.

He was with Raytheon-Washington Group International from 2001 to 2007, as VP & Aviation Program Manager.

"I'm pretty old," Ford said in a self-deprecating manner. "I started in this business with the Wright Brothers."

Since 1984 when he worked in Manhattan with Pan Am, Ford started living on and in floating homes. His first was docked in the East River near 42nd Street.

He currently resides in a floating home moored at Fort Myers Beach, Florida.

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