

Airport hosts Q&A on Elite Airways service

- By DK McDONALD The Daily News
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BULLHEAD CITY — Robert Geresy couldn't wait to go home to look at a Phoenix baseball schedule and start booking flights straight out of Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport.

"This will be great for a weekend getaway or a Thursday game," Geresy said. "I didn't know we'd be able to go down and come back the same day — this is great"

The self-described "huge-baseball fan" — along with more than 70 other area residents — attended a question and answer session Friday to find out about Elite Airways newly announced, twice-weekly, non-stop jet service beginning July 19 to Phoenix Sky Harbor International.

Flights, which begin at \$99, depart LBIA on Sundays and Thursdays at

1 p.m., arriving into Phoenix at 2 p.m. Return flights, also on Sunday and Thursday, will depart Phoenix at 10:45pm and land at IFP at 11:45 p.m. Elite also will operate same-plane service to Rochester, Minn., in which passengers can buy a single ticket and stay on the aircraft during a short stop at Phoenix.

The advantage of the service is passengers can go down and back the same day, said Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport Director Jeremy Keating.

"It allows you to have a meeting or something in the afternoon and then take an evening flight back," Keating said. "There was a certain demand for that (with American Airlines)."

Daily non-stop jet service to Phoenix Sky Harbor ended in February after American Airlines did not renew its one-year service contract with LBIA due to underuse of the service.

"I am very much in support of getting us regularly scheduled air service again — which we thought would be non-existing for the foreseeable future," said Mark Clark, Bullhead City vice mayor and Mohave County Airport Authority vice president. "It is great to be able to get this type of a program back here in Bullhead City."

The service is designed entirely for travel to Phoenix, said Jack Penning, Volaire Aviation Consulting managing partner and LBIA consultant.

"One of the problems with the American service, there were just too many seats — 70 seats every single day instead of 70 seats twice a week," Penning said. "I think that's a huge difference and by focusing in on the Phoenix market and reducing the capacity, we have a lot more confidence that we'll be able to sell those seats instead of relying on connections that sometimes were difficult to time with the American network."

Elite Airways will operate a CRJ-700 jet on the route, seating 70 people in a two-by-two seating configuration. Elite Airways passengers receive free onboard snacks and beverages, a free first checked bag up to 50 pounds, and no ticketing change fees.

"It's awesome, not just for the people who live here," said John Pynakker, Bullhead Area Chamber of Commerce executive director and Mohave County Airport Authority member. "We think with all the economic development that's going on, having a flight is going to make it a lot easier to bring those businesses into town — I think it's going to be great for us."

Laughlin Chamber Volunteers In Partnership Airport Ambassadors program also will be back, said Jackie Mazzeo, Laughlin Chamber executive director.

"We have 85 VIPs — they just love doing that and this is one of their favorite jobs, working at the airport," she said.