

UNITED'S NEW FACILITY WILL BOOST LAKE HOUSTON'S POSITION AS DISTRIBUTION HUB

BY LYNNE HAYES

Images provided by Manhattan Construction

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assengers traveling through George Bush Intercontinental Airport (GBIA) are used to the hum of construction in and around the grounds. After all, you don't get to be the 10th busiest airport in North America or ranked among the top 20 U.S. airports by the Wall Street Journal without continuous improvements.

One of the biggest enhancement projects, United Airline's new 332,000-square-foot hangar complex, is expected to open this fall.

Formally known as the United Technical Operations Center (UTOC), the new facility, which is now 60 percent completed, will consolidate United's Houston maintenance facilities, along with a



new warehouse distribution center, technical services and administrative offices.

The hangar area alone measures a whopping 200,000 square feet, large enough to accommodate two wide-body aircrafts and a standard-size aircraft at the same time. Over 13 acres of airfield is being paved to connect the complex to adjacent taxiways, and for use as exterior 'hardstand' for aircraft testing and maintenance.

"There was ground at the airport that was underutilized and our airport's anchor airline, United, was experiencing significant growth ... it was the ideal pairing," explained Mark Mitchell, President of the Lake Houston Economic Development Partnership. "The new UTOC will create tremendous efficiencies, reduce operational costs and improve logistics."

Mitchell said the facility will "align beautifully with the Lake Houston area's broader strategy for logistics and distribution growth and leverages the notion that we, along with the metro, are a big distribution hub," and that it will "be a major enticement for new businesses to locate to our city and into surrounding communities."

The project is being built and managed by the Houston office of Oklahoma City-based, Manhattan Construction Company (MCC).

MCC's Houston team, headed by Vice President and Houston Regional Manager Jason Fuller has spearheaded numerous high-visibility Houston construction projects over the years that locals know and use, including NRG Stadium, BBVA Compass Plaza and TDECU Stadium at the University of Houston. Last year, Fuller's team was tasked with recovery and renovation of Houston's cultural gem, the Wortham Theater, which flooded during Hurricane Harvey.

"UTOC is a cornerstone project for us," said Fuller, "and we're proud of our continued relationship with GBIA and the city of Houston."

MCC has a long history of working on projects for GBIA and United. Recent projects include United's recently-completed Terminal C North concourse, as well as the airport's automated people mover expansion in Terminal A, and the Terminal A-B parking garage.

The multimillion-dollar UTOC project, which Fuller framed as "the product of a partnership between United,

the City and Houston Airport Systems," requires not only tremendous competency when it comes to the actual construction, but also with managing the massive budget.

"A project of this magnitude is always evolving... part of our job as a construction manager is to ensure that we can react rapidly and incorporate these changes into the ongoing construction while mitigating the overall cost and time impact," Fuller said. "We're entrusted with being good stewards of public funds and to get the best value for what is spent."

Fuller is especially proud that his company has exceeded the City of Houston Office of Business Opportunity's MWSBE goals (minority, women-owned and small business enterprises) on this project. MCC has employed hundreds of workers since breaking ground.

"We currently average around 150 workers on site per day and will peak at around 250 when systems installation in the hangar is in full swing," Fuller said. "Among the trades represented are sitework, concrete, steel erection, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, specialty cabling and finishes; and we've worked with open shop and union labor. To date there have been 1175 different workers on site."

As for employment opportunities for Lake Houstonians once UTOC opens, Mitchell has high hopes.

"I think we'll see United ramping up jobs in maintenance, tech and warehouse, so a lot of different levels of skillsets will be needed which will be very positive for Lake Houston Area job seekers with these skills," Mitchell said.

He is excited about the great opportunities that the opening of UTOC will bring and is equally thrilled to see the project being completed in a timely manner and also under budget.

"I toured the site recently and it was looking amazing," Mitchell shared. "When you consider how this partnership is working together for the good of the community ... and how with our centralized location, great infrastructure, and a tremendous enhancement like UTOC, we are absolutely poised for even more economic successes here. We can't wait."

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