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## CLAYTON PARK/WORD ON THE STREET

# Airport hopes to become sport plane hub

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From a real estate perspective, the recent leasing of the 6,000-square-foot Hangar 24 at Ormond Beach Municipal Airport is a small deal.

From an economic development perspective, it could be the start of something big.



The hangar's new tenant is a recently formed company called Super Petrel USA Inc., which describes itself as the exclusive North American distributor of a Brazilian-made line of amphibious light sport biplanes called Super Petrels.

CLAYTON PARK

The company, whose principal partners are Port Orange businessman/commercial airline pilot Brian Boucher and two Brazilian businessmen, one of whom is the founder of Scoda Aeronautica, which manufactures the Super Petrel planes.

Boucher's company only employs four workers locally for now, but he said the goal is to grow the business to include the addition of a final assembly plane manufacturing plant.

The hangar at Ormond Beach airport is already used to assemble Brazilian-made components for Super Petrel planes, but what Boucher is envisioning would be a more full-blown manufacturing operation here.

### MANUFACTURING PLANT NEXT?

"We want our employees to grow to at least 10 by 2017," he said, adding that while the plant could be located elsewhere, he has already had initial discussions with the city about the possibility of economic incentives to build it at the airport.

Joe Mannarino, the city's economic development director, confirmed those talks, adding, "We've opened up new land, over 100 acres that could be used for light sport plane manufacturing (at the airport)."

Boucher noted that another Brazilian sport plane maker, Paradise Aircraft, recently located its North American operations at the airport in Sebring, and that more companies from that South American country could also soon be making a beeline for the Sunshine State.

"The whole economic climate in Brazil is upside down, causing a lot of Brazilian companies to relocate," he said.

The entire light sport plane industry is growing, with a number of plane makers from other countries looking to tap the North American market, he said.

Considering the warm welcome his company has received from the city, and plenty of available land at Ormond Beach Municipal Airport, it's conceivable that some of those plane makers might also want to open operations here, he said.

"You could see sport plane companies come from Brazil, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine and Germany," he said.

That's music to Mannarino's ears.

#### AIRPORT PRIMED FOR GROWTH

The city has invested more than \$7 million over the past five years on improvements to its airport to prepare for just such an opportunity, he said. Those improvements have included the addition of new taxiways, the installation of all-new lighting, a new heliport and plans to start infrastructure work on future development land at the 1,200-acre airport.

In addition, the city also owns a 173-acre Airport Business Park immediately adjacent to the airport that's home to a number of companies that could provide services to light sport plane manufacturers, Mannarino said.

"Super Petrel will hopefully be our first (light sport plane manufacturer)," Mannarino said. "We will all be looking forward to their success and future investment."

#### IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING

When asked why Scoda Aeronautica's Super Petrel sport planes are biplanes, meaning they have two sets of wings, similar to the fighter planes used in World War I, David Kyrk, director of sales and marketing for Super Petrel USA Inc., said it's to provide "better slow-flight stability, better dynamic stability in turbulent air and it allows us to be more maneuverable."

Super Petrel planes weigh 770 pounds empty and can fly at a maximum weight of 1,320 pounds. They are light enough for a single person to push them out of a hangar on to an airport runway.

The planes also use premium gasoline like one would use in cars and burn fuel at a rate of four gallons per hour.

The retail price for Super Petrels start at \$155,000 with the company's standard fuel-injected plane selling for \$169,900.

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