



# Growing Momentum

## New Tenant, New Land And A Newly Renovated Runway By Emily Fontenot



**E**ast of Lake Charles, just off the Interstate 210 loop, lies one of the more impressive sights in Southwest Louisiana: the towering hangars at Chennault International Airport, home to some of the world's leading companies in aerospace and commercial services, such as Northrop Grumman, Landlocked Aviation and Masonite's Louisiana Millwork.

Add to that list Citadel Completions, an aircraft modification company that specializes in outfitting the interiors of VVIP (Very, Very Important Person) aircraft. Marketing its high-end services to an international clientele, Citadel began operations at Chennault in fall 2018 and wrapped up its first project — a privately

owned Boeing 747 — in January.

"During the negotiations to bring Citadel Completions to Southwest Louisiana, it was very apparent that we were dealing with a leading aviation company in its sector whose focus was on excellent and benchmark services in every facet of their operation," said Chennault executive director Kevin Melton.

The project is growing and is expected to bring 256 direct jobs and 347 indirect jobs — a total of more than 600 new jobs in Southwest Louisiana.

"The infrastructure at Chennault is modern and well-suited for aircraft interior completion and MRO operations," said Citadel Completions managing director Joe Bonita. "The airport and local community have been extremely welcoming, and we look forward to

working together to build a world-class business at this incredible facility."

## Chennault Acquires Mallard Cove Property

A long-time dream became a reality last year when Chennault struck a deal with the city to acquire property near the airport — Mallard Cove Golf Course — allowing it to start marketing the land to potential developers.

"This is a major win for both Chennault and the city that's been years in the making," Melton said. "It allows us to think bigger when it comes to our future and our economic growth ... much bigger."

The city broke ground in December, 2018, on a new municipal golf course at 3400 E. McNeese Street to replace





**“We are responsible to the taxpayers, to current and future tenants and to state and federal regulators to ensure we are good stewards of our dollars,” said Chennault Executive Director Kevin Melton. “We take that responsibility very seriously by implementing fiscally sound procedures to account for every dollar spent to promote economic development for the region.”**

Mallard Cove. Once the new course is complete, the old course will officially be turned over to Chennault for economic development.

## Chennault Park Goes Global

With new momentum and new land, Chennault International Airport sought the help of global commercial real estate firm Cushman and Wakefield and Louisiana’s NAI Latter and Blum to market its business community — now known as Chennault Park — to the global market.

“We’ve got something special going here at Chennault, and people around the world are starting to realize that,” Melton said. “For us, it’s all about jobs and diversifying the Southwest Louisiana economy.”

Chennault Park is a business community made up of industrial-size hangars and hundreds of acres of available land. Top features include:

- LED-certified sites.
  - 1.5 million square feet of building/hangar space.
  - Low utility and lease costs.
  - 60 acres of usable concrete.
  - A 10,701-foot runway.
  - Nearly 700 acres of available land.
- Last year, Cushman and Wakefield, along with NAI Latter and Blum,

generated print and digital promotional material and began marketing efforts on a global scale. Meanwhile, consultants CSRS and KSA have been busy completing environmental studies, due-diligence studies and infrastructure master planning.

“At the end of the day, growth at Chennault is a community effort and will require a collaborative process across parish, city, state and federal organizations,” said Melton.

## Runway Reopens

One of the most marketable features of Chennault International Airport is its massive two-mile runway — the largest between Houston and Cape Canaveral, Fla.

Over the past two years, Chennault has undertaken the monumental task of rehabilitating its main runway. The runway, constructed in 1941, hadn’t seen major work since the airport reopened in 1986. The innovative project earned Chennault the title of Louisiana Airport of the Year in 2017.

In September, 2018, Gov. John Bel Edwards cut the ribbon on the newly renovated runway after more than \$18 million worth of repairs. Work included removing large patches of runway, pouring new concrete, bringing the taxiway up

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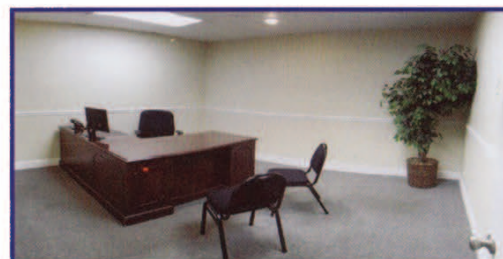
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to runway standards and installing new lighting.

Chennault secured funding for the project from the Federal Aviation Administration and the state DOTD after fighting for support at the state and national levels.

“By combining millions of state and local dollars with federal aviation funding, we have ensured a bright future for Chennault International Airport and the continued growth of quality aerospace training and jobs for Southwest Louisiana,” said the governor, who called Chennault one of the “leading aerospace assets of our state and nation.”

At 10,701 feet long, 200 feet wide and 17 inches thick, the runway can handle the world’s largest aircraft, making it attractive to developers and aviators alike.

Overall, in 2018, Chennault invested more than \$6 million in capital projects. State and federal support of this effort covered 85 percent of costs.

## New Leadership

Kevin Melton took the helm at Chennault in late April, 2018.

Melton, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, relocated to Lake Charles with his family and joined Chennault after working at American Airlines, where he oversaw major capital improvement projects at national and international sites.

Melton said his focus is “safety and compliance first.” He is “creating a culture of excellence, where Chennault is a preferred airport and aviation partner for high-performing businesses.

“We are responsible to the taxpayers, to current and future tenants and to state and federal regulators to ensure we are good stewards of our dollars,” said Melton. “We take that responsibility very seriously by implementing fiscally sound procedures to account for every dollar spent to promote economic development for the region.”

The airport and its tenants employ 1,500 people and account for \$300 million in annual economic impact. Melton said his goal is to capitalize on Chennault’s unique assets and global reach to generate more activity and more jobs than ever before, as well as to grow Chennault to become a hub of aerospace operations for the region.

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