

About Chennault International Airport

Modern-day Chennault International Airport is home to an active airfield and business community in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Originally constructed as a WWII-era air base, the facility now functions as a non-commercial airport—supporting general aviation, military operations, disaster relief, education, aircraft maintenance and repair, and other aviation and non-aviation businesses. Its runway—at 2 miles long—can handle any aircraft in the world.

Today, Chennault and its tenants employ some 1,500 people, with annual payroll of \$80 million. Chennault’s rapidly growing business community, known as Chennault Park, is home base for big-name tenants like Northrop Grumman, Million Air, Landlocked Aviation Services, Masonite/Louisiana Millwork, and luxury aircraft outfitting company Citadel Completions—with ample room for new development. Tenants benefit from nearby access to a deep-water port, rail and Interstate highways.

Chennault is amid an aggressive growth campaign with developmental efforts ongoing across the airport and its business community, known as Chennault Park. Anticipated growth could reveal a very sizeable increase in job opportunities with approximate sales tax revenue for the State of Louisiana up to \$1.1 billion.

Chennault’s Mission

To promote safe and efficient airport operations founded on benchmark services while generating economic development for the State of Louisiana and the region.

Chennault International Airport Authority

The Chennault International Airport Authority (CIAA) manages the Chennault facility. The seven-member Board of Commissioners governs the functions of the CIAA. Members of the board are appointed by the City of Lake Charles, Calcasieu Parish, and Calcasieu Parish School Board and serve four-year terms.

How It Started

The facility known today as Chennault International Airport was once a centerpiece of our nation’s defense. In the summer of 1941, the U.S. federal government bought and leased the property to build an advanced flying school for single-engine fighter pilots, the Lake Charles Army Flying School. It was re-designated in 1943 as the Lake Charles Army Airfield, a tactical bomber group training school.

Budget cuts forced the airfield to close temporarily from 1946 to 1951, when it underwent major repairs and reopened as Lake Charles Air Force Base. The base was later renamed Chennault Air Force Base after Lt. General Claire Chennault, commander of the famed Flying Tigers, following his death in 1958.

In 1963, the Air Force closed the base, leaving behind its land and assets. The base had brought new people to Lake Charles, many of whom stayed after the facility closed.

In the early 1970s, the Chennault Air Force Base property was turned over to several local governmental bodies, which were given restricted deeds to various parts of the site, creating multiple owners.

In the mid-1980s, local leaders proposed to re-develop Chennault for economic purposes. The most marketable features were the large runway and extensive property for potential tenants. The reconstituting of Chennault took place in 1986 and 1987, and it was a partnership of unprecedented proportion as local governments agreed to pool their shares of the site for the sake of desperately needed jobs.

The facility re-emerged as Chennault Industrial Airpark with a governing board, a busy schedule of site improvements, and job training programs at neighboring SOWELA Technical Community College. The name was changed to Chennault International Airport in 1997.

Today, Chennault is proud to be the first-choice of many growing companies. Once key to our nation’s defense, Chennault is now a thriving and rapidly growing economic engine for the region and state.

