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If Ya Can't Make It In Victorville... How About Alamogordo?

Sun, 29 Jan '06

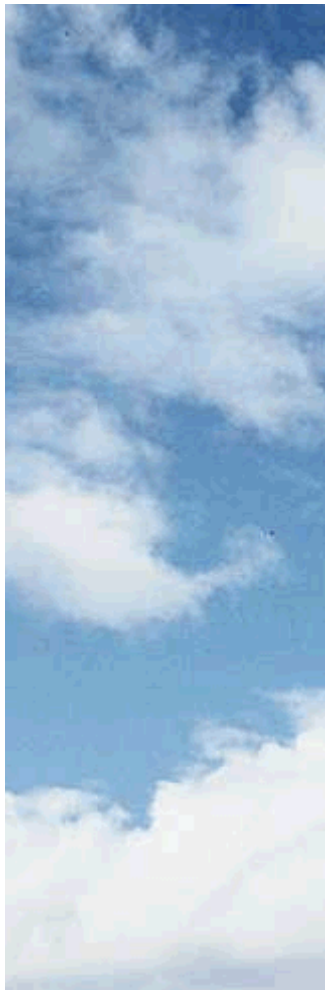
Airline Sets Sights On New Mexico -- But Still Can't Fly

Recently, **Aero-News reported on the difficulty Victorville, CA city leaders have had attracting steady commercial air service** to Southern

California Logistics Airport (VCV). That effort - and the federal funds to go with it -- was hampered further when the sole airline operating from that airport, Sacramento-based Valley Air Express, stopped flying its one and only plane from VCV to Las Vegas last fall.

When Valley Air Express left Victorville, it also appeared the airline had left the stage





appeared the airline had left the stage completely -- but it now looks like the airline merely set its sights on another airport, this one about 580 miles east.

According to the Victorville Daily Press, Valley Air Express received a \$592,000 grant to begin operations in New Mexico between Alamogordo and Albuquerque last October -- right about the time Valley Air Express exited Victorville, stage right,

The airline has yet to operate a single flight from the southern New Mexico city, however.

"They apparently are having problems getting the FAA certification to fly," said Alamogordo City Manager Pat McCourt.

The Essential Air Subsidy grant is similar to the \$400,000 annual grant Valley Air Express received for air service from Victorville. The money is set aside by the DOT to encourage commercial service from smaller cities often ignored by larger airlines.

Alamogordo -- a city roughly half the size of Victorville -- has been without commercial air service since regional carrier Rio Grande Air folded in June 2004. The airline had operated routes to several NM cities using a small fleet of Cessna Caravans.



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Perhaps in the rush to reestablish air service, Alamogordo officials apparently did not check too thoroughly into the state of Valley Air's finances, however. DOT documents from September 2005 show Valley Air Express was operating with a deficit of \$93,055. In order to set up shop in Alamogordo, DoT officials required the airline to show capital of \$276,083.

Just before the end of last year, airline President Bill Delgado sent documents to the Department of Transportation stating the airline had capital of \$277,000 -- or approximately three months operating costs - - in cash. While that may clear the way for Valley Air Express to eventually begin operations, DOT officials said it could be months before the airline is allowed to begin flying from Alamogordo.

McCourt was reportedly surprised when the Daily Press told him about Valley Air's problems in Victorville.