

# Airport eyes central Europe

Rep. Don Manzullo announces today that Greater Rockford is pursuing an international airline.

By **CHUCK SWEENEY**  
*Rockford Register Star*

Weekly nonstop flights from Rockford to a country in central Europe are being pursued by Rockford's Northwest Chicagoland Regional Airport and U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan.

Neither Manzullo nor airport Director Bob O'Brien would give the name of the country or airline. Manzullo

will reveal that information this morning at a meeting of the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

One country in central Europe is Hungary, whose capital, Budapest, is a key air hub. Malev, the Hungarian airline, flies to 39 destinations in Europe, north Africa and west Asia.

Malev also flies to two North American destinations, Toronto and New York City.

According to an Oct. 20 report from MTI-ECONOMICS, Malev's passenger traffic grew 17 percent from September 2002 through August, compared with an industry average of 2.2 percent.

Malev flies Boeing 767-200s and several versions of the Boeing 737.



Don  
Manzullo



Bob  
O'Brien

"The discussion started a few weeks ago among officials of both governments, the Rockford airport and a foreign flag carrier," said Rich Carter, Manzullo's spokesman.

"This all came about because the congressman was meeting with the ambassador from this European country, and they started talking about tourism between our two countries, and they just kept talking about it, and before

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— **Rich Carter**,  
spokesman for U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo

you know it they were talking about flights," Carter said.

The airline in question does not fly to Chicago, Carter said.

Currently, the only passenger service from Rockford is provided by TransMeridian Airlines, which flies to Las Vegas and Orlando, Fla.

O'Brien said the proposed flights would be weekly "to a central European country." O'Brien said he will go to Washington, D.C., in the next

few weeks to meet with Manzullo, the ambassador of the European country and the CEO of the airline to discuss the possible venture.

The mystery airline used to fly daily to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, O'Brien said, but traffic didn't warrant daily service.

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"They still have interest in serving the Midwest. Weekly service could be a big hit out of Rockford," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said the airline flies into a key European air hub with connecting flights to dozens of cities. To receive flights from foreign lands, Rockford's airport will have to have a customs inspection station. It doesn't have one now.

"If we can get a commitment from this international airline to do once- or twice-weekly service, we would hope that our congressman would be able to help get the customs folks to come up here from Chicago," O'Brien

said.

The Rockford airport also is meeting with officials of a Canadian low-fare carrier interested in the possibility of flying from Rockford to Toronto.

If service to Europe or Canada pans out, the local airport would have to consider another name change.

Legally, it's still the same old Greater Rockford Airport. But to snag customers from the Chicago suburbs, the airport is doing business as Northwest Chicagoland Regional. If international flights begin, it might become Northwest Chicagoland International Airport.

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