

## **2/15/01 Salem's welcomes first airport administrator.**

Alan Alexander, who recently became Salem's first airport administrator, is just as comfortable at the controls of an airplane as he is at the helm of a commercial airport. His vices are good books and good food, but his passion is flying.

He has 8,000 hours of experience as a pilot including serving in Vietnam and the National Guard, and more than a decade as an airport administrator. Alexander came to Salem from Kankakee, Ill. where he managed a similar-sized airport, but he grew up in South Carolina.

The Salem City Council created the job last fall, and it's just one of the changes they are talking about for Salem's growing airport.

Bringing back commercial airlines after eight years without them is another. The city plans to have the results of a market study exploring the possibility this spring.

McNary Field's growth potential is part of the reason Alexander took the job, he said, adding that Salem has a good location, a strong community population and a nice airport. The challenge will be to manage the expected growth and get the community involved in what's happening at the airport.

As the director, he will coordinate everything from managing airport leases to overseeing daily operations. He also will be one of the voices in the discussion about the airport's future and the possibility of commercial flights.

Expansion of the airport has a few hurdles, however. In 1970 a handful of carriers flew into Salem. But a decade after the federal government deregulated the industry, only Horizon Air remained.

One reason was that airlines stopped getting federal subsidies for operating in smaller, less-than-profitable cities.

Horizon Air pulled out of Salem in 1993, when it attracted only 1,733 passengers for its 534 flights to Portland.

But Urban Development Administrator Dick Hayden said he is confident that there is a growing demand in Salem.

"There's a significant market, and an increasing one, for commercial flights out of Salem."

If the council's study proves that Salem could support an airline, the group will have to decide whether to pay \$10,000 to work up a presentation for airlines.