

## **New airline looking to boost local economy**

[MATHEW PELLEGRINO](#)

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The West Florida region is looking to move further west. Manifest destiny will soon hold true for the Pensacola Regional Airport as it reaches out for a link with Southwest Airlines.

TEAM Santa Rosa held a meeting with surrounding chambers Wednesday morning to discuss Southwest's fly-in to Pensacola's airport.

The Santa Rosa County Chamber of Commerce is currently working with the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce in extending a pledge to its locals. The vow is asking local residents to help bring the airline company to the Gulf Coast region.

The pledge, which can be accessed at [pledgeluv.com](http://pledgeluv.com), gives those in support of the new initiative an opportunity to make a dollar pledge towards the new Southwest move. If the airline comes to Pensacola, pledges have ten days to claim their pledge online, and will receive a Southwest Airlines gift card for the amount they put down.

That gift card will never expire according to President and CEO of Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce Evon Emerson, but supporters must verify their pledge within that 10-day period to get the gift card.

“Our goal is to get as many people signed up right now,” said Emerson.

This airline move would save Santa Rosa County residents about 3 hours of driving time from Southwest's closest fly out location, New Orleans International Airport.

Donna Tucker, executive director for the Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce said TEAM Santa Rosa is pushing towards getting local businesses involved in the pledge.

“TEAM Santa Rosa is heading up a county effort to get area businesses to go online and pledge for Southwest Airlines,” said Tucker.

That pledge was brought to Santa Rosa County's attention after the Pensacola chamber reached out for promotional help with the move.

Emerson said this move would help strengthen not only Pensacola, but the Gulf Coast as a whole.

“This is something we can celebrate as a win together,” said Emerson, “This is working very well for us right now. That’s why we’ve asked Santa Rosa and Baldwin County to participate.”

The popularity and low price fairs according to the board should boost local’s attention. Emerson said the average airfare price for a Southwest flight is \$113.00 one way, and the airline company just happens to be the number three travel site on the internet.

Not only will pledgeluv.com be a beneficial site for supporters, but those who don’t have the money or don’t wish to pledge can show support by joining their group on Facebook.

Charles Wood of the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce encouraged people who couldn’t pledge to go online and join the Facebook group, which already has 2,985 members.

“We ask that you push this out. We want to pull them into Pensacola,” said Wood.

A local Gulf Breeze resident and Southwest Airline worker, Linda Welt was in attendance at the meeting, and said this move would be a positive one for the area.

“I have worked for Southwest for 17 years...with each place they fly into, they are involved in the community,” said Welt, “If we could go ahead and get Southwest here, it would be a wonderful impact.”

If Southwest is approved, their fleet of Boeing 737’s is expected to fill no less than 7,600 seats a day. On average, that is about eight flights, and Wood said, he expects it to be much bigger.

"Southwest has never gone into a market with less than eight flights a day. We should expect at least 7,600 seats a day. The numbers are tremendous," said Wood.

Pensacola Airport officials will travel to Southwest’s lead headquarters in Dallas the week of Oct. 20-24 to discuss the move to Pensacola.

At the meeting, the chambers discussed ways they could get the word out before the October 20 cut-off date. A few hours after the meeting, a rally at New World Landing in Pensacola took place for supporters of the new airline.

Frank Bruwski, a local resident, said he would help get the word out, in hopes that Southwest would fly into PNS.

“It’s going to being in an economic development engine, and we need to get people involved,” said Bruwski, “It’s not just about tourism, it’s about local business.”