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BCWest Air connecting Abbotsford and Island

By Mark MacDonald *Publisher*

ABBOTSFORD - For the past five years, Gerry Visser has been thinking about starting an air service from Abbotsford to Vancouver Island.

For the past three years, Shanon Maurer and Ken Thorsen have been thinking about starting an air service from Vancouver Island to Abbotsford.

Someone who had knowledge of both interests managed to get them together for a chat, and a schedule was born.

Maurer and Thorsen started BCWest Air in 2006 to service the Nanaimo-Fraser Valley route on a charter basis. When Visser joined the group, they added an Abbotsford-Victoria schedule.

On October 15, BCWest Air began Monday, Thursday and Friday flights three times a day between Abbotsford and Nanaimo, meaning the two cities are now only 20 minutes apart by air. They also run an Abbotsford-Victoria route once a day three days a week.

By the end of November, they hope to offer daily flights.

"We're really excited about this service," says Maurer, the

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TAKING FLIGHT

The BCWest Air team, from left: Shanon Maurer, Ken Thorsen and Gerry Visser

BCWest Air starts Abbotsford-Island service

Cont'd from Second Front
company president. "There is a real demand for connecting service to the mainland.

"We wanted to provide an easy, friendly and cost-effective travel service that connects mid-island residents with other BC destinations including Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, and Abbotsford International is the perfect fit," he adds.

Flights leave Nanaimo at 7:30 a.m., and with WestJet leaving each morning at 9:15 a.m. to every destination it serves in Canada, BCWest Air is an independent feeder airline.

"Ken and I originally looked at Abbotsford as a destination, but now with the addition of Gerry, we look at it as a hub," Maurer says, adding that by taking a flight as opposed to a ferry, passengers "add three hours to their day."

Tickets are \$99 one way, and \$189 return between Abbotsford and Nanaimo. BCWest Air

planes have six seats for passengers, and return flights leave Abbotsford at 5:15 p.m.

"Nanaimo residents have a need for a service outside of Vancouver," says Maurer. "Our schedule offers a stop in Boundary Bay, so customers can make a connection at YVR (Vancouver), but many of our passengers are going to Alberta and Mexico, so connecting at YXX (Abbotsford) just makes sense."

The owners are pilot-operators. Thorsen has been flying since 1987. Maurer has been in the aviation business for 5 years, and Visser has flown for 14 years.

BCWest air also has flights from Nanaimo to Boundary Bay Airport in Ladner, and from Victoria to Abbotsford.

The Boundary Bay connection is designed to link Fraser Valley passengers to Vancouver International Airport, via a 15 minute shuttle ride to YVR, for \$39 one way.



Shanon Maurer, left, and Ken Thorsen ready for take off

Jay Teichroeb, Economic Development Manager for the City of Abbotsford, notes the arrival of BCWest Air is the latest piece of good news for the Airport.

"The recent BCWest Air decision to fly to the Island, from all indications, has been very well received," he says. "We'd like to see them expand their routes as well."

Abbotsford International handled over 500,000 passengers last year, and projections indicate that could increase to 1.7 million passengers on an annual basis within 20 years.

"We're on a rapid track to ensure we're ready with expanded services and more space," he says. "We're working with various airlines to expand services. We believe there is an international market in the Fraser Valley, and improved connections back east (in Canada)."

www.bcwestair.com