

March 29, 2019 - Return to the Bartow Airport and its Runways Restaurant

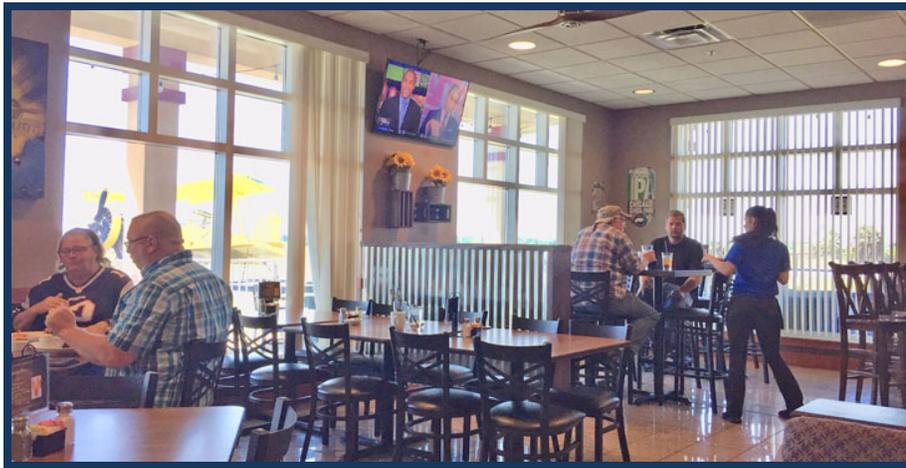
When I used to live in South Carolina I would fly my twin engine Piper Comanche down to the Central Florida's Bartow Muni airport whenever I needed maintenance performed on the airplane. The Aircraft Engineering Company, and its owner, Bill Turley, specialized in Piper aircraft and always did an outstanding job in handling my work. To boot, they would give me a 2 place Piper Cherokee 140 for my return flight back to Hilton Head, at absolutely no charge. And, should I wish to remain in Florida, say to visit Miriam for a week or so, there would be a courtesy car available. It was either a El Camino, which was a cross between a 2 door sedan and a streamlined pick-up truck, or, if I got lucky, a Cadillac 4 door with ALL of the accruements. Now that I am living in Florida, the maintenance on my little light sport aircraft is done right there on my home-field, so no local transportation is required. However I still try to get over to the Bartow airport every once and while as it has very competitive fuel pricing. However after its restaurant closed some two years ago, I just haven't been in a hurry to return... that is until today.

I recently learned that a new restaurant, called *Runways*, had taken over the same space where the old restaurant, *Runway 9/27* had once occupied. So, it seemed that a return visit might be in order. Saturday was a simply gorgeous early spring day in South Florida. Winds were relative light, the skies were deep blue and the visibly endless. It would be about an hour and 10 minute flight in each direction and its fuel was being advertised at \$3.58 per gallon, showing a bit of an increase in price as we began to approach the popular summer flying season. The winds were light,



while favoring Runway 27R, as I entered a standard left hand downwind to the traffic pattern at this Tower controlled airport. There was only one other airplane in the pattern, doing touch and goes, and the tower personal seemed happy for the opportunity to log another arrival to their daily count.

The ramp was rather full but, since my airplane is small the line-man managed to find a spot to squeeze me into just adjacent to the new & sprawling terminal building. While most of the planes on the ramp were of the single and twin general aviation types, there was one large biz jet parked there. However I never did use my FAA registration phone app to see to whom it belonged.



The new terminal building is rather impressive for what is a typical small hometown airport. A handful of "senior" pilots, much like myself, were sitting on the front porch just "chewing the fat" and enjoying the cool outside breezes. I spent a few minutes commiserating with them as they raised questions with regard to my Highlander. One of the more enjoyable aspects of flying to many of these small general aviation airports is the opportunity to meet and talk to many people with similar interests. It is always amazing how many that I come across are retired military or airline pilots with many an interesting story to tell. It just goes to reinforce the understanding that even though I have 60 years of flying under my belt with well over 6,000 flying hours logged, there is always someone who is more experienced & more talented, so don't be too full of yourself Frank

Inside of the terminal building it is very nice and well appointed, but on this particular Saturday, also very empty. The same was true of the restaurant. Even though it was noontime, the customer base was sparse. The decor was certainly "aviation orientated" with plane pictures and paintings and small models everywhere. Even the overhead fan blades were designed to look like engine props. The booths were comfortable and roomy enough to accommodate four people comfortably and up to 6, in a squeeze. I ordered a sliced roast beef sandwich on a hoagie bun, as jus, along with crisp fries. The meal was good, the food tasty, and the return flight was as enjoyable as the trip up. I will probably be making a return to the Bartow Municipal airport in the near future as I will always have need for a pilots basic staples... fuel and food!