

Airline service is a concern for young professionals

When Forward Sheridan began its strategic planning process, airline service was identified as one of the top 10 challenges facing the Sheridan community.

As the Economic Development Strategic Plan was being drafted, the community did not wait to address this challenge; instead, Great Lakes Airlines was recruited to provide additional air service.

An airline service task force was created to continue to address this challenge, considering tertiary service needs, flights to additional hubs, and lobbying for additional amenities — larger planes, restrooms, flight attendants, and online check-in.

With the departure of Big Sky Airlines, this task force will be instrumental in facilitating community discussions and creating strategies to provide the frequency of flights and level of service that Sheridan has now come to expect.

hYPE, helping young professionals engage, was formed to answer a different challenge posed by the community and Forward Sheridan — how do we retain young workers and their families in Sheridan, and how to we recruit additional young workers into Sheridan?

hYPE has been actively addressing this challenge, creating a vibrant social network for young workers, creating appealing activities, promoting existing activities, and working to enhance the Sheridan community as a destination to live, work, and play.

The departure of Big Sky Airlines has been a catalyst for discussion among hYPE members — young workers travel for business and pleasure, and we expect certain amenities to be standard.

By partnering with the airline service task force, hYPE representatives have a forum to voice these concerns.

Young travelers, the next-generation traveler, look at air travel differently than business travelers, frequent fliers, or older travelers.

Young travelers expect cheap tickets and expedient services; amenities should be standard. Airlines that provide the cheapest, most efficient route between point A and point B get our business.

When a young worker books a flight, ticket price is the first priority. I'll give an example: Young worker A wants to travel to Miami.

Since there is no direct flight from Sheridan to Miami, young worker A will be flying from Denver to Miami.

Let's assume that a round trip ticket from Denver to Miami is \$200. Young worker A now needs to get to Denver, a six-hour drive from Sheridan.

If the round trip ticket price from Sheridan to Denver costs more than gas and parking fees, young worker A may opt to drive to Denver.

If young worker A is traveling with a family of B, C, and D, those family members will have to purchase airfare to fly from Sheridan and Denver.

If young worker A drives to Denver with B, C, and D, gas and parking remain a constant (assuming that young worker A's vehicle can seat four people).

If a round trip ticket between Sheridan and Denver costs \$200, young worker A, traveling alone, may fly or drive to Denver. However, young worker A traveling with the family will drive to Denver, saving a substantial amount

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of money in airfare.

Young workers are looking for the cheapest way to get from point A to point B.

Travel time is also a consideration for the young worker — the young traveler looks for the most efficient way to get from point A

to point B.

Continuing with the example above, Denver is a six-hour drive. If young worker A wants to fly out of Sheridan, he'll need to arrive at the airport an hour prior to the flight to check in at the ticket counter and receive a boarding pass.

Flight time is approximately an hour and a half to get to Denver; once in Denver, the young worker will need to allow enough time to deplane and travel to the gate of his next flight.

With three arrivals in Denver daily, the young worker may have to wait two or three hours for the flight to Miami. The young worker has now spent many hours waiting and traveling, assuming there are no flight delays.

Young workers believe that certain amenities should be standard — e-ticketing and online check-in, restrooms and flight attendants should be standard offerings of all airlines.

Young workers do not want to arrive an hour before a flight to check in with a ticket agent. Young workers want to print a boarding pass online, arrive at the airport, move through security, and board the plane with minimal wait times.

If an airline cannot provide e-ticketing and online check-in, it is unlikely that it will receive a young worker's business.

The ability to print an e-ticket and a boarding pass is considered an amenity in Sheridan; however, the young worker considers this to be a standard service offering.

Online check-in could be a particular benefit to the Sheridan airport, freeing ticket agents to perform their other assigned preflight duties.

The concerns above may resonate within the community. Young workers have a particular logic that prioritizes these concerns among our age group.

Understanding the concerns and the rationale behind these concerns may provide additional insight to the challenges facing Sheridan's air service.

By voicing all of our desires, we can prioritize our communal needs and solicit for airlines to meet those needs.

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After living and working in the Baltimore/D.C. area, she relocated to Sheridan.

In addition to working with Forward Sheridan's task forces, she is an active member of hYPE and the Jaycees and volunteers as a member of the Trail End Museum members' guild.

"A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.