

SPOTLIGHT ON A MEMBER:

The Downtown Manhattan Heliport: At the Core of the Big Apple

by Martin J. Pociask Photos courtesy of Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.



Small take off and landing areas, coupled with high structures, make helicopters the natural choice for business travelers and sightseeing visitors.

In real estate parlance, it's location, location, location. The importance of location cannot be overstated. That, along with historical significance, helps to make Helicopter Association International (HAI) member, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's Downtown Manhattan Heliport (DMH), a one-of-a-kind operation.

The heliport serves as a conduit and an oasis for business, tourism, and residential activities in one of the world's busiest downtown commercial centers. Presidents, heads of state, world leaders, popes, kings, stars, and performing luminaries such as the Beatles have passed through its operations, helping to make this heliport so special.

New York City has a total population of 8,008,278 people in its five boroughs. Manhattan is home to 1,537,195 residents. Approximately 85 percent of these residents use public transportation to get around town and through the congestion. Amazingly, this compares with the national average of 5.3 percent. Manhattan is an island, (New York County), flanked on its west side by the Hudson River, on the east by the Harlem River, the East River on the south, and is only reachable via 12 bridge and tunnel crossings.

The island is 13.4 miles long, only 2.3 miles wide at its widest point and 0.8 miles at its narrowest point. Each business day, approximately 6.7 million

commuters enter the central business district. About 4.4 million commuters enter via subway, bus, or commuter rail. Add to this number the large influx of visitors and you get the picture that getting around this area of the Big Apple can be challenging. The concentration of so many people in a relatively small area contributes to the city's structures going ever upward rather than outward. This goes a long way to explain how location is very much responsible for the DMH's role, and its importance to the region's transportation scheme.

Operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey on a site leased from the City of New York since December 8, 1960, the DMH has been a cornerstone for travel in the always busy, and often congested, Manhattan, where despite being connected by numerous tunnels and bridges, negotiating the human and structural obstacles can make it difficult to get from here to there.

Helicopters have proved invaluable in this environment. Their ability to clear most structures, and their small takeoff and landing area requirements, make helicopters the natural transportation choice for the business traveler, sightseeing visitors, and those who just need to get to where they are going, on time.

Located in New York City, a world commerce hub with its large financial district, tall office skyscrapers, and home to Wall



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Street and the U.N., the heliport is situated just above the Battery on Pier 6, on the East River between the north side of Pier 5 and the south side of Pier 8. The DMH is within easy walking distance of the financial district. It is important to note that the facility was the first heliport in the United States to be certified for scheduled passenger helicopter service by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The DMH is one of four FAA designated national demonstration projects that were designed to enhance the latest developments in helicopter operations equipment. Two were never built and the third eventually closed. This most advanced facility also boasts the installation of a microwave landing system, an advanced communications system, and improved visual aids to accommodate the heliports all-weather, 24-hour operations

mandate. Between 1980-1986, the heliport moved its operations to Battery Park City during redevelopment of DMH.

The Heliport is extremely convenient to its major air traffic-generating center, the downtown Manhattan/Wall Street area. It is only seven minutes by helicopter from Newark International or LaGuardia Airport, eight minutes from John F. Kennedy International and Teterboro Airports, and fifteen minutes from Morristown, New Jersey Airport. The DMH is also the first public heliport with a semi-automatic fire protection foam suppression system and the first to use a barge for aircraft parking. Located opposite the Vietnam Veterans Plaza, the heliport occupies an area of 84,000 square feet. The pier is 550 feet by 85 feet. The barge is 90 feet by 300 feet. There is ample space for parking 12 helicopters on the pier and barge,

and 18 automobiles in the parking lot. The DMH helicopter parking can accommodate helicopters up to 50,000 pounds.

The terminal offers administrative office space, and package and breakdown areas for courier operations that are busily rushing billions of dollars worth of financial documents from the area airports to the local financial institutions. It also has an excellent VIP lounge and general passenger waiting area complete with all the comforts of a modern airport facility, including a tourist gift shop. The DMH terminal houses the Port Authority Heliport Operations Center and a pilot lounge. DMH contains additional features such as year-round heating, air conditioning, ventilation, and lighting for maximum comfort and convenience, and microwave navigational equipment. The heliport's terminal building is one of the most advanced

in the industry. The soundproof terminal is enhanced by an attractive décor and seasonal plantings. Heliport tenants include DHL Airways, Dow Jones & Company, Inc., and Liberty Helicopters, Inc.

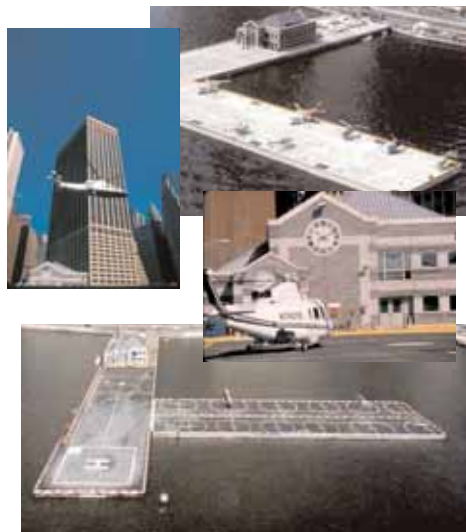
Since there is no scheduled helicopter service at JFK, EWR or LGA airports, some helicopter companies provide services based from and into the downtown heliport. HAI members, Schiavone Helicopter, based at Teterboro Airport, and Liberty Helicopters, Inc., based at the DMH and the West 30th Street Heliport, have been providing charter helicopter service to the city area and shuttling between connection points for the business commuter and sightseeing operations. Another helicopter company, Wall Street Helicopters, Inc., is also based at the DMH. To better understand the role the heliport plays in this city's transportation plan, let's look at the big picture.

Celebrating its 83rd anniversary, the Port of New York Authority, which was established on April 30, 1921, was the first of its kind in the Western Hemisphere and the first interstate agency created under a clause of the Constitution permitting compacts between states. The Port Authority of New York was modeled after the Port of London, which, at that time, was the only public governmental authority in the world.

The establishment of the Port Authority was a very historical achievement in its own right. Prior to that milestone, the states of New York and New Jersey, since colonial times, had experienced numerous boundary disputes and quarrels over their divided and contested common port, harbor, and waterways, including the Hudson River. The situation was so volatile that there are reports that at one point state police from the two jurisdictions exchanged gunshots in the middle of the Hudson River. The dispute was finally settled by the Treaty of 1834 that resulted in the creation of what

was then called the "Port District," a bi-state region of about 1,500 square miles, centered on the Statue of Liberty. In 1972, the name was changed to The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to identify more accurately its status as a bi-state agency.

The Port Authority struggled financially until 1930 when the states gave the agency control of the newly opened Holland Tunnel. The Port Authority began blazing new paths in transportation, engineering, law, and administration. Bridges and tunnels were constructed in the late 1920s and into the 1930s; three airports were leased in the late 1940s. In the 1950s and 1960s came



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the Port Authority Bus Terminal, a second deck on the George Washington Bridge, the world's first container ports at Port Newark and Elizabeth, and acquisition of the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad which became the PATH rapid transit system.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Port Authority helped advance the region's interests through port and trade promotion, and construction of the World Trade Center. Other achievements included development of industrial parks; a business park and satellite communications center on Staten Island; and a legal center and resource recovery facility in Newark.

The latest news concerning the heliport is the startup of the first U.S. helicopter shuttle service since the 1940s. Griffen Air, out of Connecticut, is scheduled to begin operations during the 3rd quarter of 2004, serving all the local airports operating in and out of DMH. Another helicopter company, America Rising, based out of Washington, D.C., is also planning to begin a shuttle service in the near future.

Philip Landi, former Manager said, "The Downtown Manhattan Heliport has surpassed the expectation of those of us involved in its planning and construction. Now VIPs, Wall Street executives, emergency crews, corporations, and others who do business in this area can get to lower Manhattan within minutes. For many, it has become an indispensable part of New York City life."

Phil believes that the next important development will be the certification of the Tiltrotor that could provide a shuttle service to Washington and Boston. Phil says, "The tiltrotor helicopter is the answer to [business commuter] travel." In 1985, he witnessed the X-15 demonstrate its microwave landing system.

Lanny Rider, Manager of Teterboro Airport and former Manager of the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, (appointed to that position after coming in as Phil's assistant in 1987) said, "The Downtown Manhattan Heliport has always supported missions that enhance the region's quality of life, including air medical rescue, VIP movements, financial document transport, environmental monitoring, and law enforcement. We also take seriously our responsibility to be good neighbors to the people who live, work, and learn near the heliport. That is why we encourage pilots using our facilities to fly friendly avoiding residential areas."

After Lanny, Jay McGowan, who was Pilot, Chief Pilot and Manager of the heliport for nine years from

1993 to 2002, took the helm, and true to its long history, the heliport made itself available to assist in the efforts of local municipalities, various law enforcement, and emergency service agencies to provide humanitarian services whenever the call came. At the 2001 Salute to Excellence Awards Banquet in Orlando, Florida, on February 16, 2002, the entire staff members of the Police Airborne Service Unit of the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey were awarded the Igor I. Sikorsky Award for Humanitarian Service for their outstanding efforts following the 9/11 attacks. Jay McGowan received the award on behalf of the Port Authority. Jay stated, "I considered my job with the Port Authority as the best job in aviation, flying as well as managing the heliport in the hub of the helicopter world. The heliport put me in the very center of that hub, where I could see it all."

The Port Authority and the heliport are committed to the community and are serious about responding to the quality of life issues that concern their neighbors. Rick Wegel, current Manager of the DMH, said, "Revitalizing Lower Manhattan's transportation infrastructure is one of the Port Authority's critical missions and recognize that the Downtown Manhattan Heliport will play an important part in the downtown renaissance. That's why our business plan calls for shuttle service to regional airports and scheduled service to Washington, D.C. These services will help us deliver on our commitment to customer service and ensure that this facility has an active role in the rebirth of Lower Manhattan."

At the hub of New York/New Jersey's transportation system, the DMH has also been described as the heliport of the future. The all-weather heliport has been, and continues to be, busy moving people and documents to their destinations quickly and safely, serving the needs of corporate executives in the Wall Street district and a diverse



Current Heliport Manager, Rick Wegel (far left); and past Managers, (left to right) Jay McGowan, Lanny Rider, and Phil Landi. Each of these men believes that the DMH is an integral part of the community and not just a service provider.

downtown community. Most corporate travelers are repeat customers. It's easy to see why. The DMH facility is state-of-the art, provides maximum safety, and contributes to the long-term growth and economic health of the greater New York/New Jersey region.

Industry leaders, government officials, and couriers depend on the DMH as the fastest and most convenient way to get people, goods, and documents in and out of Manhattan, and to enable the financial district to move investment and business capital from point-to-point, with direct and timely access to business partners and associates

throughout the world. They recognize that the helicopter provides one of the fastest means to conduct business in the region. They also recognize that the DMH is a first-rate helicopter service and is committed to operating one of the finest aviation facilities anywhere. That is so important to a region that continues to maintain its position of excellence and serve as the nations major aerial gateway. HAI is proud of the DMH and the men and women who operate it. **R**

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DMH runway. The heliport provides one of the fastest means to conduct business in the region.

