

Soda Springs celebrates new air ambulance base

SODA SPRINGS — A medical helicopter base in Soda Springs that can save lives by getting aid to patients much faster held a grand opening Wednesday.

Air Idaho Rescue, which has been at the site since April 1, held a ribbon-cutting and provided a free picnic that drew an estimated 500 people to the community's Allen H. Tigert Airport at the edge of town.

The company also had a PC-12 fixed-wing medical airplane at the event for display purposes, though only the helicopter will fly out of Soda Springs.

Mayor Austin Robinson said he was pleased the company chose to put its air ambulance helicopter in Soda Springs.

"I think it's going to be a very positive impact," Robinson said. "Not only for our community, but Montpelier, Driggs, Bancroft, Preston, Star Valley. I think it's fantastic."

Air Idaho Rescue, whose parent company is Air Methods, now has Idaho air ambulance bases at Driggs, West Yellowstone and Soda Springs, in addition to an airplane base at Idaho Falls.

Robinson believes the new base at Soda Springs even has some potential to bolster economic development.

"You couldn't ask for a better arrangement," he said. "They've been really, really good. Really good to work with."

Caribou County Sheriff Kelly Wells said the Air Idaho Rescue helicopter has already proved its worth. It's been a huge help with some of the accidents that have happened in the area.

The helicopter, which is designed for high altitudes, gives ready access to medical services in other areas and helps complete the package when it comes to responding to medical emergencies, he said.

Wells says the area includes mining operations and lots of recreational activity, tourists and elderly people. So there's potential for something to go awry.

"There's constantly a lot of moving parts," he said. "If someone gets injured, it's reassuring to have something so close that can be that effective."

The greater speed — the helicopter flies 130 to 140 mph — in getting treatment to patients who are in critical need is vital.

"Just the amount of time that it could save in that situation could be very incredible," Wells said. "It could be the difference between life and death."

IMPulse

Intermountain Media Pulse

A TRUETONE INCORPORATED COMPANY

**news
CLIP**

11623 Lake Shore
Nampa, ID 83686
(208) 880-9814

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Idaho State Journal

Pocatello, Idaho

Thursday Aug. 2, 2018

by Scott Kraus

Page 2 of 2

Further, he's had the chance to ride on the helicopter and was able to get a bird's-eye view of the entire county. That could come in handy during a search and provide a better idea of how long it would take to reach someone in the backcountry who needs help.

Mike Jenkins, the area manager for Air Idaho Rescue in Montana and Idaho, says the company chose Soda Springs to base the helicopter because of its ideal location.

"All of our data pointed to Soda," Jenkins said.

Christopher Kokoska, director of business development for Air Methods, said Air Methods is the parent organization for companies in 48 states, including about 350 helicopters and about 40 fixed-wing airplanes.

He said that just in July, the helicopter in Soda Springs, which is available 24/7, provided 20 medical transports. Overall, it's flown 40 to 50 transports since opening.

The company, which has the lowest accident rate per flight hour for medical helicopters in the U.S., also flies a lot of children suffering newborn issues to hospitals.

"To have access to a helicopter makes everything better in so many ways," Wells said. "We're very appreciative they picked Caribou County for this."

###

Copyright 2018 Idaho State Journal