

LIMA: The Often Overlooked Airport

by Saxon Henry

Photography by Elizabeth Glasgow



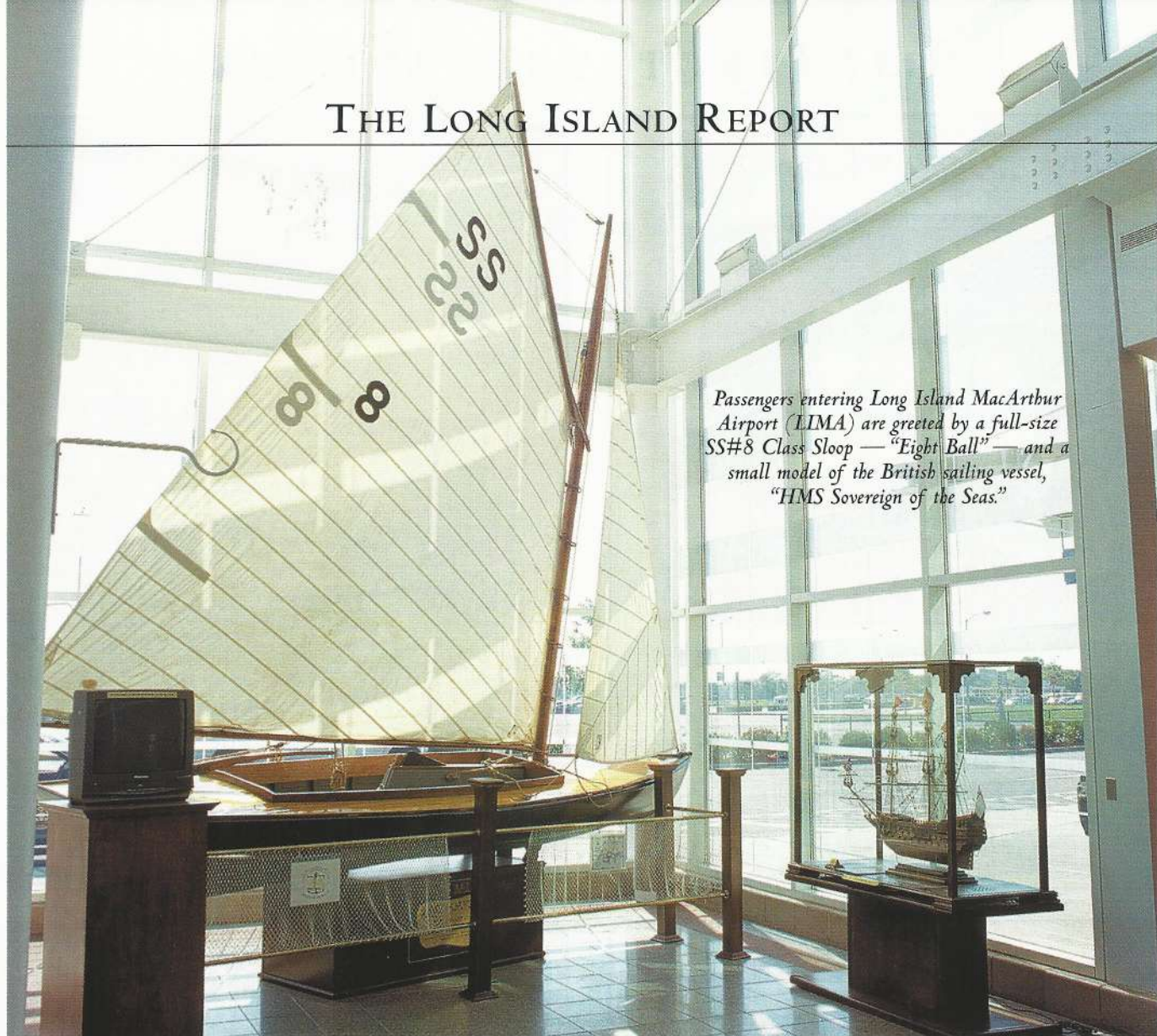
WELL BEFORE September 11, 2001, many analysts were predicting that a complete system failure was looming on the horizon for the air travel industry. Though not all industry experts were so pessimistic, most admitted that a growing number of challenges were facing the flying public with each passing year: the number of cancelled flights had risen 700 percent in the previous five years, customer complaints were up 20 percent for the third year in a row, and flight delays rose 15 percent in 2000 alone. Then one morning in early September last year the industry was altered in ways no one dared previously imagine.

The major airports in the region — La Guardia, Newark and JFK — took a great deal of criticism after 9/11 for lapses in security, and efforts to fix the problems (and failures to do so) have been well publicized. Not as visible in the national media, but also challenged to tighten security measures in this new era are smaller airports, such as Long Island MacArthur Airport (LIMA) in Islip.

Though unable to comment on specific changes, Islip Town Supervisor Pete McGowan insists, “Our goal has always been to protect the health, safety and welfare of the passengers using Long Island MacArthur Airport. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, have only served to intensify our resolve to meet that goal. We will continue to cooperate fully with all agencies involved, as well as fulfill all FAA requirements.”

If you’ve never flown from LIMA, you may be pleasantly surprised. The airport is hailed as a value and quality-of-life alternative to the area’s larger airports. In a report released in October 2000, *Consumer Reports* rated LIMA as a better-value airport along with Denver International, Lehigh Valley International, Orlando International and Dallas/Fort Worth International. “The better airports tend to offer the lowest fares and the fewest delays in their region,” states the report. “The arrival of low-fare carriers like Southwest Airlines helped put MacArthur in Long Island, NY, on the map.” Calling LIMA the “often overlooked airport” because it’s only 42 miles from La Guardia, 43 miles

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Passengers entering Long Island MacArthur Airport (LIMA) are greeted by a full-size SS#8 Class Sloop — "Eight Ball" — and a small model of the British sailing vessel, "HMS Sovereign of the Seas."

from JFK and 65 miles from Newark, *Airliners* magazine states that the facility has become one of the fastest growing airports in the country.

More than two million passengers used LIMA in 2001, and revenues generated by the airport prior to 2001 consistently increased after the facility was expanded in 1998 and 1999. Revenues rose from \$5.6 million in 1998 to \$10.8 million in 2000, though they dropped slightly — to \$10.1 million — in 2001. "Based on the passenger count figures of 2,274,000 for the year 2000 and the reported census numbers of 2,754,000 for Nassau and Suffolk counties, it would seem that a large percentage of Long Islanders use the airport," remarks McGowan, who has been instrumental in the airport's current success.

East Patchogue residents Marge and John Bosco, who flew out of LIMA to West Palm Beach for a summer vacation last August, are among

the Long Islanders who use the airport. "It's fabulous," says Marge. "Not having to deal with the traffic going into the city is such a relief."

"We've lived here all our lives and we saw this place go up," adds John. "It's close to home and it's great."

Stefanie Sanford, who grew up on Long Island, now lives in Columbus, Ohio. She flies into LIMA regularly to visit family. "I think it's good for Long Island — not too big, not too small," she says. "The planes are usually on time, so I haven't had any bad experiences here or delays like I've had at other airports."

With fewer delays, says US Airways ticket agent Brian Hickey, there are fewer frustrated customers to serve. Hickey, who worked at La Guardia before transferring to LIMA, remarks, "It's a lot less hectic here. Most people like to be able to walk up here and then to board without waiting

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LIMA's updated facilities include an expanded baggage area, additional parking and a fresh appearance.



in line. I can do a lot more detail here . . . I can spend more time taking care of customers."

The spacious ticketing area in which Hickey serves his customers was expanded to its present size during an extensive renovation completed in September 1999. The \$11.5-million project, which was funded by passenger facility charges, more than doubled the number of ticket counters — from 20 positions to 48. Restroom facilities were also updated. The baggage claim area was expanded with the construction of four new carousels, the entrance road to the terminal was relocated to provide for additional parking and other amenities were updated in the terminal. The project, says McGowan, was completed on time and under budget. The original estimate for the revamp was \$13 million. Better

still, the renovation didn't require the use of tax dollars from Islip's town coffers.

The expansion also added several new airlines to the list of LIMA carriers. Southwest Airlines, Continental Express and ASA (a Delta Connection) joined American Eagle, Comair (a Delta Connection), Delta Express and US Airways Express. These carriers now provide 100 flights into and 100 flights out of LIMA every day, an increase of 38 flights per day over last year.

Many design elements in the terminal, especially in the light-filled atrium that leads to the departure gates, serve as reminders that Long Islanders have a long history with the water. Passengers are greeted upon arrival by

Welcome to Long Island

Hailed as a value and quality-of-life alternative to the region's larger airports, LIMA offers passengers convenience, fewer delays and less hassle than larger airports.

a full-size SS#8 Class Sloop — “Eight Ball” — and a small replica of the British sailing vessel, the HMS Sovereign of the Seas. “The facility is very clean, well maintained and pleasing to the eye,” remarks Anthony Stampalia, a technical trainer, curriculum developer and technical writer for the Société Internationale de Télécommunications Aéronautiques (SITA) based in Bohemia. “La Guardia and JFK both seem to have been under construction for the last six years. LIMA is, and looks, brand spanking new.”

Stampalia, a Ronkonkoma resident, flies out of LIMA as often as he can, citing many reasons for his loyalty. Parking is a breeze at LIMA, he says, and he doesn't hesitate to leave his car in the parking lot in Islip for a week, something he would never consider doing at either JFK or La Guardia.

Along with the considerable amount of time he spends flying as a commercial passenger, Stampalia holds a private pilot license. He accumulated his flying hours at both Farmingdale's Republic Airport and

at LIMA, where he became certified in larger and more complex planes. Any pilot learning to fly in New York City airspace should experience approach and departure at a larger airport such as LIMA, he remarks, in order to become experienced with radio contact, transponders and highly controlled airspace procedures.

“I believe most people don't try LIMA because they prefer direct flights,” says Stampalia. “I personally have no problem changing planes. If travelers, like myself, weigh the costs and convenience involved in domestic travel from JFK and La Guardia versus LIMA, I believe they would choose LIMA.” But, this cheerleader for “the overlooked airport” does have one hesitation when it comes to bragging about LIMA. “The only thing I'm afraid of is jinxing a good thing,” he explains. “I'd hate to be part of making LIMA busier and less convenient for me than it is now!”



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