

Airline

Continued from page 1

out fees at the airport.

Rosasco, the City of Marathon's contracted finance director, said the local connection can make a difference in this venture being successful where others have failed.

"I think that's a positive influence. It's stationed here in Marathon," Rosasco said. But he said the local venture would be backed up by a partnership with a proven and reliable service. "The guys at Bahamas Express have a very nice setup in Ft. Lauderdale."

Bahamas Express provides

the local owners of AirStar with sales, marketing and customer service, in addition to fulfilling some of the licensing requirements for the service.

According to documentation submitted with the proposal to the county commission, the license held by the service requires that all flights be completed before funds are released to the company. This serves "as a reassurance to the Marathon community that we will operate to our schedule at all times," according to the proposal.

"If we're going to do this, you've got to be reliable," Rosasco said.

The service is seeking to start with two to three round trip

flights per week, and "establish reliable service."

The airline says it is also able to provide some additional redundancy through an agreement with a company called Aerborne Aviation, which can supply aircraft if necessary.

The focus on reliability springs from the experiences Marathon has had in the past with a small, regional carrier setting up service only to disappear in the midst of a Federal Aviation Administration investigation.

Gator Air allegedly violated FAA regulations by operating scheduled air service without the proper training and authorization. The company folded with some tickets still outstanding, and customers had to fight for reimbursement.

The owner of the air service that flew for the "travel service" of Gator Air — Aztec Airways' Stewart Hanley — had announced last year that he would make a go at scheduled service in Marathon, but has yet to begin. Hanley did not return the Free Press' calls for comment.

Marathon Chamber of Commerce CEO Daniel Samess said he hopes the local connection will make all the difference

this time around.

"They know the markets. They know the businesses. They're here contributing to our businesses and destinations," Samess said. "They already have a stake in this community."

Samess said it spoke well for the locals that they were able to land a partnership with an established company.

"I think it's another positive that they are partnering with Bahamas Express," Samess said. "They'll have a large enough fleet should the demand arise."

Initially, the airline will fly two to three flights between Marathon and Ft. Lauderdale. According Baker, the company is looking to "establish service to Ft. Lauderdale International first and expand our routes to other major Florida airports in the near future as the need arises."

At the commission meeting, Baker said Marathon wouldn't see the only benefit.

"The Ft. Lauderdale Airport Authority is all over this," Baker said. "They want us to fly there."

Commissioner David Rice, who put the item on Wednesday's agenda, said AirStar had the right formula.

"We've seen the wrong equip-

ment, with Delta, going to the wrong location," Rice said. "If they have fewer people scheduled, they fly smaller aircraft."

The airline, which flies a three-passenger Cessna 172 and has access to a number of eight-passenger Cessna 421s and even larger planes from associates, has not yet announced a schedule or ticket prices.

"Everybody asks 'How much is it?' Well, I don't know yet," Baker told the commission.

Baker said plans were just now solidifying, in the wake of commission approval.

"We're going to start slow with this thing," he said. "We'll be up within a month. We want to get some marketing out."

"I think any additional consistent scheduled air service to Marathon is a good thing for our businesses," Samess said. "The chamber will do what we can to get the word out."

Baker was hopeful this venture would succeed where others have not.

"We're not coming from New England or wherever. We've been operating here for years," Baker said. "I think we have a better grasp of what's going on down here. Now it's just a question of convincing the community."

KEY people



Kevin Wolszczak

Resides: Various places along the East Coast. Raised in Marathon

How long in the Keys: Since June 1978

Where born/lived: Indianapolis, Ind.

Occupation: Property manager

Used to be: Professional sales representative

Rather be: Congressman

Most recent home-cooked meal: New Zealand lamb with couscous

Most recent meal eaten out: Key Colony Inn

Last book read: The Bible

Last movie watched: "Casablanca"

Hobbies: Providing free psychotherapy/counseling my friends

Favorite place in the Keys: Sombrero Beach

Favorite TV shows: "Two and a Half Men"

Favorite saying: "What a blessing that is"

Dream car: 1958 Corvette

Dream date: With my fiancée, anywhere in the U.S.

Ideal Evening: Candle lit dinner at home with my family and friends

Pet peeves: Negativity. I sidestep it like the Heisman

*Have You Made Your
New Years E-Resolutions?*

Call Shirley to start a new e-marketing plan today!

Ask for a free website analysis.

E-mail: Shirley@FloridaKeys.com

Visit us at: www.FloridaKeys.com/info

305-394-1987



I'll quit smoking _____



You fill in the blank. We'll help you succeed.

The Keys to Quit Smoking program is FREE.

Even nicotine patches are FREE! Convenient times and locations.

KEYS AHEC
THE KEYS TO HEALTH

743-7111

► **keystoquit smoking.com**