

MIDDLE KEYS

Air service restarting?

County to be asked for OK at meeting today

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Despite repeated failures in recent years, yet another company appears set to give commercial air service a go at Florida Keys Marathon Airport.

Charter operator Bahamas Express and Middle Keys-based charter company AirStar Executive Airways are expected to propose, at today's Monroe County Commission meeting in Key West, starting up scheduled flights between Marathon and Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport.

AirStar President Jim Baker told the *Keynoter* that airplanes are in place and his company has the blessing of both the Federal Aviation Administration and federal Department of Transportation.

It's up to the county to decide whether to provide counter space, use of the ter-

minal and arrival and departure areas at no charge for one year.

Bahamas Express holds a DOT Part 380 license allowing it to advertise scheduled service up to four days a week, County Commissioner David Rice said. AirStar, which holds a Part 135 on-demand charter license, would basically be a subcontractor for Bahamas Express.

Many Marathon residents remember the failed 2008 Gator Air experiment at the airport. That company held a Part 135 license, which is reserved for charter or on-demand services only, and was illegally advertising scheduled flights.

Shortly after Gator Air service began — and was quickly suspended — came news that an FAA investigation of the operation and subcontractor Aztec Airways was under way. It wasn't long before the county suspended Gator Air's privileges to land in Marathon.

That's why the key word in Baker's discussions with Rice and airport Manager Reggie Paros has been "reliability."

"Gator Air had a reputation for being unreliable and people aren't going to fly unless they can depend on it. A major thing from both sides was reliability. They seem to be committed to being reliable," Rice said.

Paros told the *Keynoter* Bahamas Express' Part 380 license makes it much more accountable to customers.

"When a person pays for a fare, it goes in escrow and it's not released to the charter service until after the service has been provided. It seems to allow an extra layer of protection to the flyer," he said.

Baker said the operation would start slow to get a feel for demand. He said flight times and prices have not been discussed.

"We don't know what the reaction is going to be, so we're going to start small. It's all about doing it right," he said.

AirStar has two planes, a three-passenger Cessna 172 and an eight-passenger Cessna 421. Baker said Bahamas Express has access to larger planes should the need arise.

LOWER KEYS

Naked 'king of the world' jailed

Keynoter Staff

Keys tourist Richard Gervasi probably learned his lesson and, when he heads to Monroe County Circuit Court for his arraignment, will likely be fully clothed.

Gervasi, 43, of Phoenixville, Pa., was arrested early Sunday morning after reportedly running into traffic on Big Pine Key while naked and yelling he is "king of the world."

Deputies tased him three times to get him under control. They said he was drunk and tripping on LSD, and that in addition to stating he's king of the world, Gervasi also said he's "made of steel"



GERVASI

arrest.

Sheriff's Office Deputy Danielle Malone responded to the parking lot of Bobalu's Restaurant at 1:30 a.m. after dispatchers received reports of a nude man running into traffic on U.S. 1. She found three men — Gervasi and two of his friends, all on vacation — in the parking lot. Gervasi had no clothes on.

while he was taken into custody.

He's charged with disturbing the peace and resisting

Deputy Becky Herrin says he attacked one of his friends when Malone arrived, then ran at the deputy. He refused to stop when told to do so, so Malone tased Gervasi. But that didn't stop him and he pulled the prongs out of his skin, Herrin said.

Malone hit him with the Taser again, and he went down. Deputy Joe Cortner arrived as backup, but Gervasi got up and started walking toward his friends. He was tased a third time, and finally handcuffed, then taken to Lower Keys Medical Center for evaluation before making the trip to jail.

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