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Wilmington News Journal • 47 S. South St. • Wilmington, Ohio • 45177

Friday, February 26, 2010

CCPA briefed on motorsports at air park

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A map gave Clinton County Port Authority members a frame of reference to see the part of the Wilmington Air Park proposed as a site for an occasional motorsports event. Pictured left to right are Port Authority members Fred Ertel (partly hidden), Chairman John Limbert, Bill Marine, Kathleen Madison and Richard Thompson. Not pictured yet present was Dan DiBiasio, while Ed Kuehn was absent. (News Journal Photo/Gary Huffenberger)

The future landlord of the Wilmington Air Park heard a presentation this week about the prospect of using the airport as a site for an occasional motorsports competition.

Rob Jaehnig, CEO of Life Impact Productions, a Wilmington-based company that produces events, put forward the idea to the Clinton County Port Authority (CCPA), which soon will own and oversee the air park.

Jaehnig asked CCPA members whether they liked the general concept, setting aside for a moment practical problems that would have to be worked out for the event to occur. During the Wednesday meeting, CCPA Chairman John Limbert said the Port Authority expected to meet again in two weeks and would provide their reaction to the idea then.

A significant question, Limbert said, is whether the air park bondholder would agree to the proposal. Utilizing the air park in any way other than the current usages requires approval of the bondholder, according to Limbert.

The bond trustees "move at their own pace," Limbert said. He said getting the blessing of bond counsel would take at least four to six weeks.

Jaehnig had said earlier the time frame for the first motorsports event was late April or May.

It was members of the Sports Car Club of America's Cincinnati region who contacted Jaehnig about the possibility.

"The draw is the fact we have concrete," Jaehnig said. The sites currently used by the Cincinnati region members have surfaces that are in poor shape and, moreover, are not concrete.

Jaehnig promoted the idea by saying it would be good for local business due to the money the drivers would spend while they're here. Eighty-nine percent of Sports Car Club of America members make \$50,000 or more annually, according to information provided by the club.

The Port Authority would benefit through the exposure an event would bring to the air park, Jaehnig said. It also would receive a rental payment from the car club for the one-day event, "probably near \$1,000," as well as a sum from Life Impact Productions, Jaehnig said.

Twenty-one airports have hosted Sports Car Club of America solo races, according to a list provided by Jaehnig. A few of them are Toledo Express Airport, Pennington Field in Bedford, Texas, Columbus Air Force Base in Columbus, Miss., Brooksville Airport in Brooksville, Fla., and Walesboro Airport in Indiana.

"They have experience meeting FAA security and regulations," Jaehnig said.

The section of the Wilmington Air Park being eyed is an area with an existing fence. According to Limbert, the area currently is used to store equipment, tugs and containers — inventory which DHL intends to liquidate.

In solo competitions, originally called autocross, cars travel a flat course, delineated by traffic cones, one-at-a-time to determine who can complete the run in the shortest time. Penalties are imposed for hitting cones and not staying on the course.

The Sports Car Club of America said it has staged solo events on inactive airfields and in parking lots for more than 30 years. The club said it conducts more than 1,200 solo events per year.

Clinton County commissioners Randy Riley and Mike Curry have lent their support to the idea, as has Wilmington Mayor David Raizk, Jaehnig said.

Each solo event is supervised by a licensed, certified safety steward, according to the club.

Speed on the straight sections of a course do not exceed the 60 mph range because of the tight configuration of the courses, according to the club.

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