

AReCO in the News

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By ANNA MARIE KUKEC, Daily Herald Business Writer

Massive marvel of aviation

Airbus lands in Boeing's back yard

Bruce Propst of Elk Grove Village has worked in aviation for about 40 years but had never seen anything like it.

He was awe-struck as the sun glimmered off the blue tail and the massive Rolls Royce engines of the Airbus A380 — the world's largest passenger jet. This behemoth had just made a delicate landing and dwarfed the 747s that taxied to make way for the newcomer off of Runway 4 Right at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport Tuesday afternoon.

"Now that's a tremendous looking aircraft," said Propst, an aircraft technician for Flight Check aircraft maintenance company. "That's history."

Propst was part of the ground support crew, along with hundreds of his colleagues, who encircled the aircraft with their vehicles to check out the new jet on the block. To check out their future.

After all, German airline Lufthansa plans to start flying the super-jumbo jet to O'Hare by fall 2009.

The 1.2 million pound, double-decker Airbus A380 has the wingspan of a football field and is packed with high-tech features. It almost could be called a triple-decker because a lower level area was carved out for 12 bunks so the flight crew could take shifts sleeping on long routes.



The jet includes a bar, social area, two staircases, 15 bathrooms and individual TV sets with video and audio on demand and touch-screen access. You can even get a burst of caffeine from self-help coffee stations.

Just think of it as a cruise ship for the air.

And a quiet one — it makes half the noise of the 747, Airbus officials said.

“This is one of the first airplanes that really addressed the noise issue,” said Arlington Heights President Arlene Mulder, who was among the dignitaries to tour the jet. “I’m looking forward to this.”

The A380 also was greeted by hundreds of airline executives, reporters and aviation enthusiasts, including many who stopped traffic or pulled over along Mannheim Road to watch history arrive.

But before Airbus makes money, it has to sell more of the aircraft. So Airbus went on an inaugural tour to New York and Los Angeles on Monday and Chicago on Tuesday to promote the plane’s long-haul features. Talks were scheduled Tuesday with United Airlines, which partners with Lufthansa as a member of the Star Alliance, but a United spokeswoman declined comment.

Airbus has orders for 156 jets from 14 customers, including Korean Air, Thai Air and Qantas. The jets can accommodate 500 to 800 passengers.

Besides the \$319 million price tag for the jet, many airports still need to upgrade runways to accommodate its weight and sheer size. The plan is to reinforce and widen Runway 10 Center at O’Hare to accommodate the A380, said Rosemarie S. Andolino, executive director of the O’Hare Modernization Project.

While the improvements are scheduled to be completed by 2011, Lufthansa will start arrivals and departures of its A380 at O’Hare prior to that year. The federal government will provide waivers until the work is completed, she said.

“It’s exciting to see a plane like this and how it can service growing markets like China, India and the Middle East,” said Airbus Chairman Alan McArtor. “And Chicago’s at the commercial crossroads.”

He gushed about the A380’s environmental advancements of fuel efficiency per passenger and lower noise levels.

But many local residents who have been battling noise and pollution still are concerned about the massive jet, said Jack Saporito, executive director of The Alliance of Residents Concerning O’Hare.

“It’s more passengers, more cargo, more gridlock,” said Saporito. “How can that be better?” asked Saporito. “And anything that expends 85,000 pounds of fuel can’t be all that environmentally friendly.”