

Issue 23 | December 2025

New Year, New Newsletters:

Introducing CLE Connection & CLE Connection: CLEvolution

As we turn the page to 2026, we're also turning a new page in how we connect with you and how we share the story of our multi-year modernization effort!

Starting in January, Hopkins Approach will officially become CLE Connection, a rebranded newsletter designed to better reflect who we are, where we're going, and how we want to engage with our community.

We're also proud to introduce CLE Connection: CLEvolution, a new and separate newsletter dedicated to all news related to the multi-year modernization journey of our airport.

Together, CLE Connection and CLE Connection: CLEvolution will offer a more complete picture of our airport's future, one that's bold, connected and forward thinking.

Here's what you can expect:

CLE Connection

- A clean, contemporary design
- More dynamic storytelling and visuals
- A name that proudly reflects Cleveland and our mission to stay connected
- Fresh features and insights from across our organization

CLE Connection: CLEvolution

- Project updates, timelines, and transformation highlights
- A deeper dive into how we're building the future

We're incredibly proud of what Hopkins Approach has represented and even more excited about what CLE Connection and CLE Connection: CLEvolution will become.

Keep an eye on your inbox in January! See you in 2026!

Looking back at 2025

It has been an exciting year for Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE), with significant groundwork laid for our revolutionary future.

In May, CLE launched CLEvolution, embarking on a transformative multi-year plan to reimagine the future of aviation while reshaping the front door to the City of Cleveland. It was at this time that our signatory airline partners unanimously approved an additional \$301 million of funding to support increased public parking capacity, a critical component of the first phase.

- In June, nearly 600 contractors and consultants from around the world converged on Cleveland for our Industry Day event, which provided insight and information about Phase 1 of the Terminal Modernization Development Program (TMDP), focusing on the landside portion of the airport.
- Phase 1 will begin in 2026 with the launch of our Gold Lot project in partnership with Shook Construction, which was selected through a competitive process in the fall.
- Two additional firms have also been contracted for the TMDP, one for Program and Construction Management and another for the new Parking Garage and Ground Transportation Center, which will commence following completion of the Gold Lot.

To help bridge the period before construction of the new headhouse, which is still a few years away, CLE initiated an expansion of the Central Checkpoint.

- This ongoing project will double the number of lanes from two to four and relocate the queue line off the ticketing level to ease congestion.
- As part of the effort, the restrooms in the area were completely reconfigured, including the addition of a family restroom with an adult changing table. The new restrooms opened in November.

June also brought the completion of our Airport Sustainability Management Plan (SMP), which ensures that capital projects are being carried out in a way to minimize current and future emissions. CLE's plan aligns with the City of Cleveland's Climate Action Plan.

In July, CLE celebrated our 100th Anniversary with three days of festivities for employees and guests including giveaways, treats, music, merchant specials, specialty cocktails and a fly-by of a C47 "Hairless Joe" which then landed for tours and photos.

This summer was a major win for our guests as we introduced several customer service initiatives under our new Hopkins Hospitality program.

- In July, we launched our Guest Pass program, allowing non-ticketed visitors to access the secure side of the airport to accompany or greet friends and family.
- In August, CLE implemented the Sunflower Lanyard program for guests with hidden disabilities and debuted our Hopkins Hounds Therapy Dog program, designed to ease travel-related stress and bring smiles to travelers throughout the terminal.

In September, CLE completed building our Executive Management team with the addition of four new executives to help continue building our legacy while accelerating innovation.

Also in September, Air Canada announced new nonstop service to Montreal-Trudeau International Airport, expanding our International Routes.

The summer and fall seasons also saw the debut of a new marketing campaign and four new community partnerships aimed at boosting our visibility and strengthening our connection with the communities we serve.

- In September, CLE established partnerships with University of Akron Athletics and Cleveland State Athletics.
- Those connections expanded in November with the addition of two more partnerships with the Cleveland Cavaliers and Kent State University Athletics.

October marked a hugely successful first Flight School event, giving guests who are uncertain about flying the opportunity to complete a "test run," including TSA screening and aircraft boarding. The response was so overwhelming that the airport plans to host the event twice a year moving forward.

In November, CLE earned Level 1 Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA) for taking a critical step towards its ambitious sustainability goals by compiling a carbon footprint report to quantify its annual carbon emissions. This ACA achievement recognizes CLE's continued commitment to achieving Net Zero Emissions for Scope 1 and Scope 2 sources by 2050.

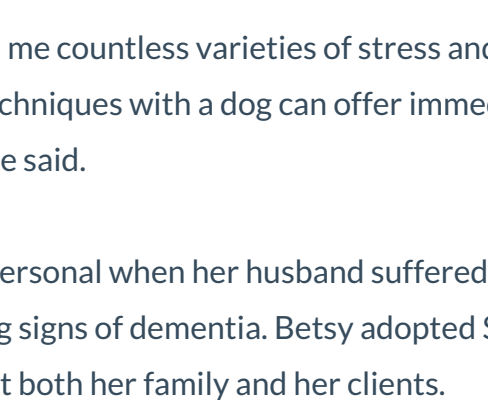
This year, CLE was awarded a total of \$30,323,505 in grants from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT).

As we look ahead to 2026, we are grateful for your continued support as we strive to build a world class airport for the residents of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. We hope you had a magical holiday season and wishing you a Happy New Year!

Transportation Security Administration Introduces New Identity Verification Option for Travelers Without REAL ID

Travelers here at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE) and other airports nationwide will soon have access to a new identity verification option if they arrive at Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoints without acceptable identification.

On December 1, 2025, TSA announced this new identity verification option where beginning February 1, 2026, passengers will be able to use TSA ConfirmID, a modernized identity verification system, by paying a \$45 fee.



This optional service allows travelers to verify their identity for a 10-day travel period and is designed for those who do not yet have a REAL ID-compliant license or other approved form of ID. TSA recommends paying the fee online before arriving at the airport to help avoid delays.

Acceptable forms of ID include REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses, U.S. passports, DHS trusted traveler cards, and other federally recognized documents. A full list is available at [TSA.gov](https://www.tsa.gov).

TSA officials emphasize that identity verification is essential to maintaining safety and urge all travelers to upgrade to a REAL ID as soon as possible. Travelers who use TSA ConfirmID at the airport should expect delays.

So, if you're traveling through our airport and don't yet have a REAL ID, be sure to plan ahead and consider TSA ConfirmID to help keep your journey on track.

To view the full announcement, view [here](#).

CLE Supports United Airlines' Annual Fantasy Flight Tradition Take Off, Bringing Seasonal Magic to Local Families

This December, Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE) welcomed more than 20 local families aboard its annual Fantasy Flight, a heartwarming journey designed to bring joy, imagination, and a sprinkle of magic to children in our community.

Families arrived at CLE expecting a routine flight and while everything appeared business as usual at the gate, there was no sign of what was to come. With boarding passes in hand, children and their families boarded a United plane for a short, scenic "flight." But when they returned to the terminal, they stepped into a transformed world: the North Pole!

United employees, dressed as cheerful elves and other seasonal characters, welcomed them into a winter wonderland filled with games, treats, and a visit from Santa himself.

United's Fantasy Flight annual tradition offers children facing serious illness or hardship a chance to experience the wonder of the season in a truly unforgettable way.

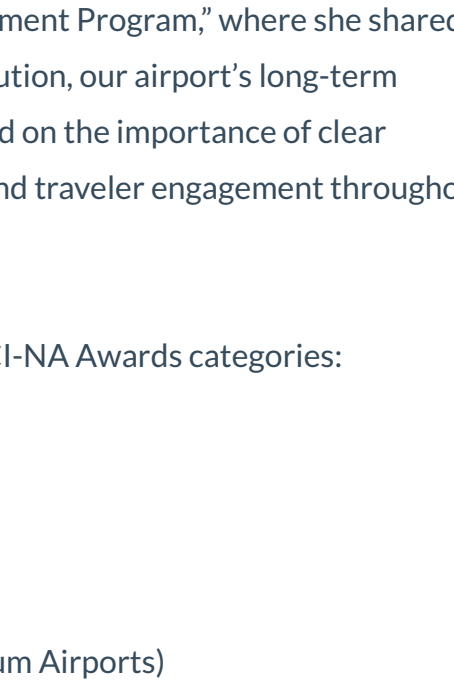
"We're proud to support United's Fantasy Flight each year," said Megan O'Connell, Assistant Director of Marketing, Communications, and Guest Experience at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. "It's truly one of the most meaningful and memorable moments of our season. It's about more than just travel, it's about creating moments of joy, wonder, and connection that these children and families will carry with them for years to come."

As one of several airports across the country participating in this initiative, CLE is honored to help bring a little extra sparkle to the season for families in Northeast Ohio.

Wishing you a joyful and peaceful winter from all of us at CLE!

Hopkins Hounds Spotlight: Betsy & Serena Bring Calm to CLE

Since joining the Hopkins Hounds Therapy Dog program in September 2025, Betsy and her beloved eight-year-old Border Collie, Serena, have become a comforting presence at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. Whether they're walking through the concourses or chatting with travelers, their mission is simple: to bring calm, connection, and a little joy to everyone they meet.



For Betsy, volunteering as a Hopkins Hounds handler is a natural extension of her life's work. With decades of experience in business and healthcare, and as a professional coach and trainer in Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT or "Tapping"), she's seen firsthand how stress affects people.

"My career has shown me countless varieties of stress and struggle and how integrating calming techniques with a dog can offer immediate healing to humans of all ages," she said.

That insight became personal when her husband suffered a brain injury and her mother began showing signs of dementia. Betsy adopted Serena, hoping to find a dog who could support both her family and her clients.

"I wanted a very calm yet smart dog," she said. "Once I found Serena, it was obvious we were a team."

Serena was already a certified therapy dog when Betsy learned about the Hopkins Hounds Therapy Dog program. The pair had spent nearly seven years volunteering in healthcare facilities. When Betsy came across a post about the newly launched airport program on social media, she was immediately intrigued by the opportunity to bring Serena's calming presence to a new setting. She reached out to learn more, scheduled an evaluation, and after completing supervised orientation, they officially joined the Hopkins Hounds team.

"I like that every visit is unique and that we meet such a wide array of people from all walks of life. It's fun to talk with people about where they are heading and what they think of Cleveland," she said. "I travel quite a bit myself and have lived in this area my entire life, so I can often help with a question, fear of flying or chat about a destination easily."

For Betsy and Serena, each visit to CLE is a chance to make the airport a little more welcoming.

"I think we help make Cleveland feel friendlier to everyone who passes through," she says. "It's a joy to be part of something that brings comfort and connection to so many."

To learn more about the Hopkins Hounds Therapy Dog program, [click here](#).

Ready to Fly? Book Your Next Flight Directly from our Website!

Planning a trip? Whether you're heading out for business, visiting family, or escaping for a well-earned break, you can search and book flights directly from our website with just a few clicks.

At Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, we proudly offer service from more than nine different air service providers.

These include:

- Aer Lingus
- Air Canada
- Alaska Airlines
- American Airlines
- Delta Air Lines
- Frontier Airlines
- JetBlue Airways
- Southwest Airlines
- Spirit Airlines
- United Airlines

These carriers offer nonstop and connecting flights to major hubs and popular destinations across the U.S. and beyond.

You can find additional information about these airlines [here](#).

We also offer scheduled charter services via:

- Apple Vacations
- Caesars Rewards
- Sun Country Airlines

Visit our website to:

- Search available routes
- Compare airlines and fares
- Book directly with your preferred carrier

[Book a Flight](#)

Also, don't forget to pre-book parking! Make your trip even smoother by reserving a spot in advance

[Reserve Parking](#)

CLE Recognized as Multi-Category Finalist at ACI-NA Marketing & Communications Conference

As 2025 comes to a close, Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE) is proud to be recognized on the national stage for its impactful work in marketing, communications and customer experience.

Earlier in December, Megan O'Connell, CLE's Assistant Director of Marketing, Communications, and Guest Experience, represented our airport at the Airports Council International – North America (ACI-NA) Marketing & Communications Conference in Kansas City. This annual event brings together airport professionals from across the U.S. and Canada to share insights and innovations shaping the future of aviation communications.

O'Connell participated in a featured panel titled "Where Messages Meet Masterpieces: Communicating Your Development Program," where she shared CLE's approach to telling the story of CLEvolution, our airport's long-term modernization initiative. Her remarks focused on the importance of clear communication, stakeholder collaboration, and traveler engagement throughout the transformation process.

CLE was honored as a finalist in these five ACI-NA Awards categories:

- Brand Identity
- Digital Advertising
- Print Communications
- Websites
- Customer Experience Programs (Medium Airports)

These finalist distinctions highlight CLE's dedication to elevating the passenger experience through creative storytelling, strategic outreach, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Being recognized among top airports across North America is a meaningful affirmation of the team's efforts and vision.

As CLEvolution continues to unfold, CLE remains focused on building a modern, welcoming gateway that reflects the energy, pride, and progress of the Greater Cleveland area. Insert photos from the conference.

CLE Announces New Certified Members

Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE) is proud to welcome new American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) – Certified Members (C.M.) – Pat Ruedisueli and Joel Woods.

Bryant L. Francis, C.M., Director of Port Control, shared that as an AAAE Certified Member, he is always proud to see other members of the airport staff earn this honor.

"I believe the knowledge gained through the certification process and earning the C.M. designation played an important role in advancing my career," said Francis. "The certification offers a distinction which is recognized in our relatively small industry of U.S. Airports and can contribute to career progression opportunities, among other benefits. I commend both Joel and Pat for the dedication and preparation required to realize this achievement."

According to AAAE's website, earning the C.M. designation is an excellent way to demonstrate your commitment to a career in airport management.

"Becoming a Certified Member of AAAE is a wonderful milestone personally, however, setting the example for the team that I am privileged to lead is what gives it much more meaning," said Joel Woods, Interim Airport Manager of Burke Lakefront Airport. "My goal will be to help all interested employees to acquire the CM designation as I believe the knowledge gained from preparing for this test is invaluable!"

The program enables individuals to become well-rounded airport professionals who apply their knowledge to enhance the safety and efficiency of their airports.

"Earning the AAAE Certified Member (CM) designation was an important personal and professional achievement for me. It required dedicated study, discipline, and a deep understanding of the operational, regulatory, and leadership responsibilities involved in airport management," said Pat Ruedisueli, Interim Assistant Commissioner of Airside Operations & Maintenance. "Completing the program reinforced my confidence in the decisions I make daily and affirmed that my experience is grounded in recognized industry standards."

"Beyond the credential itself, the CM program reflects my commitment to growth, accountability, and continued improvement. It represents my desire to lead with knowledge, credibility, and integrity, and to be prepared for both current operational demands and the long-term challenges facing our industry as a whole," he added.

To earn the C.M. designation, candidates must successfully complete a 180-question, multiple-choice examination. AAAE offers electronic study materials along with specialized training courses to support exam preparation.

Upon passing the exam, individuals retain the C.M. designation for life, along with all associated rights and privileges, provided they maintain AAAE membership. For those who meet the additional requirements for the Accredited Airport Executive (A.A.E.) designation, the completed exam may be applied toward the A.A.E. program, offering a clear pathway for further career advancement.

Watch for more stories like these that share information about DPC and our airports. The stories in this issue of *The Hopkins Approach* demonstrate how we are working together to fulfill the *Department of Port Control's* Mission, Vision, and Values, including our RESPECT Model and Strategic Priorities.

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