

A New Concourse E at PDX, a Lifetime of Memories for Those Who Built It

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Over the past four years, more than 2,000 architects, engineers, construction workers, artisans and artists worked day and night to build an inviting new home for Southwest Airlines at the Portland International Airport. The brand-new Concourse E, which opened July 15, showcases new shops and dining, curated artwork and an epic view of Mt. Hood.

Southwest's move to Concourse E helps balance out passenger use at PDX, as the largest two air carriers at PDX – Alaska and Southwest – were previously located on the south side of the airport.

For a number of folks at the Port of Portland, who worked from conception to completion to bring Concourse E to life, this project has been a team effort – one built in an environment of mutual respect and partnership. Hear what some of these employees have to say about the creation of Concourse E – from their best moments to how they faced unexpected challenges, all while staying true to the collaborative spirit that's a hallmark of this project.



*Top row (left to right): Dan Gilkison, Melissa Schaffer, John Bravard, Irene Ng
Bottom row: Abby Carey, Don Tjostolvson, Joanna Ambroz, Frank Schmidt*

What was your proudest moment when working on this project?

Dan Gilkison: Too many to count! This team worked extremely hard gathering input from a multitude of stakeholders: Port, airline, concessions tenants and personnel. We held 29 workshops to gather feedback and turn it into something we haven't seen at PDX in nearly 20 years.

Joanna Ambroz: Every day is my proudest moment on this project. Everyone has had such an amazingly positive attitude and I think it has shown at every step of this project's life. I've continued to be proud of how the team comes together time after time to resolve construction issues, and I am amazed at the dedication and passion that every member of the team has toward building the best structure possible.

Frank Schmidt: The Port project team working together, the partnering relationship with Skanska, and the coordination with stakeholders has shown effective collaboration at a very high level. In particular, the relationship with Skanska has been one of mutual respect, embracing a common goal of construction site safety and producing quality construction while maintaining the project budget and schedule.

Abby Carey: My proudest moment to date was taking a package of 10 new concessions lease agreements to Port Commission for approval. I was so excited about the mix of dining and shopping options coming forward. Not only was it my first Commission presentation, but I was so honored to have many of our small business partners in attendance sharing their warm appreciation with Commission.

Tell us about an unexpected challenge and how you overcame it.

Joanna: The biggest unexpected challenge arrived when Port staff were directed to work from home due to the coronavirus, but the project was directed to not delay in opening! Luckily, this team has been working together for many years with well-established communication protocols in place, and we were already using a virtual platform for those that couldn't meet in person. It hasn't been easy, but everyone has had a great attitude, which has helped us reach the finish line.

Melissa Schaffer: My biggest challenge was coordinating with tenants looking to make last-minute changes that impact the project budget and schedule. Having a great relationship with my tenants has really helped bridge the gap between reality and desires.

Abby: The biggest challenge was COVID-19 hitting just as all 10 of our concessions' construction projects were breaking ground. It was heartbreaking to see six out of 10 locations pause their construction, and it is disappointing that they weren't ready to unveil when the Concourse E extension opened. It is impressive that nearly half of our concessions – four of the 10 – were able to persevere. We look forward to staggered openings of the remaining six, prolonging the celebration one by one throughout the next year!

Don Tjostolvson: There is an old saying that construction is simply a series of challenges and unexpected conditions that must be successfully resolved to deliver a product. This is especially true at an airport where you are connecting to an existing structure and building over ghosts of the past. We had our fair share of unforeseen underground obstructions, product failures and operational impacts. However, the responses to these unexpected challenges always involved a team effort. The unique culture of this project was how everyone took off their individual company hats and contributed to a resolution.

When you tell friends and family about your work on this project, what are you most excited to share?





Irene Ng: I've been telling everyone, "When we open the facility, you have to go to the end of Concourse E and see the view of Mt Hood!"

John Bravard: Every time I walk through the concourse and see the well-lit, open and crisp look of the space, I can't help but appreciate the efforts by so many that made this space fantastic. Next flight with my family will be an early arrival to give me time to show it off!

Frank: I am amazed at the incredible art displays in the east and west nodes. To me, it is like the cherry on top of a strawberry sundae and makes this amazing facility uniquely memorable.

Abby: When sharing my work on this project with loved ones, I usually name-drop Tillamook as the big new attraction. It resonates because all Oregonians know Tillamook is a big deal, and also who doesn't love cheese? I'm personally most excited about the new Juliett cocktail bar by Lightning Bar Collective and ChefStable – the overall aesthetic, vegan-friendly menu and women in aviation theme are like nothing PDX has ever had. It also caps off the end of the concourse with incredible Mt. Hood views, and I just couldn't be more excited to see what it looks like when it's complete!

Of all the Port projects you've worked on, where does the Concourse E extension fall on your list and why?

Dan: Working on this project is one of my proudest accomplishments in 19 years at the Port. The camaraderie of this team is amazing. This project and team have seen it all and still delivered an amazing new concourse extension, new ticket counters, baggage make-up units and common use gates.

Irene: I've been working on the Concourse E extension since before I began working for the Port. I would say it is the best project of my career because, without this project, I would have never been introduced to the Port. I was impressed by the staff's talent and passion on the Concourse E extension. This care to see a project be successful made me want to be part of the team.

Melissa: The top! It's very rewarding to be involved in such a large-scale project from concept and see it through to the end. The facility looks amazing and I can't wait for others to see it!

Don: Definitely at or near the top. Everyone on the team was passionate about their contribution to the project. Despite the myriad of experiences and personalities that exist on any team, I never once doubted anyone's intent on doing what they thought best for the project. It is an amazing group of people that worked hard at communicating, staying committed through the tough spots, and keeping the end goal in mind.