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Pacific Seaflight moves forward with plans to launch Southeast Alaska Service 2008

JUNEAU, September 10 / Alaska News -- The University of Alaska (UAS, Juneau) last week inked its support of a local enterprise that, according to its founder and President, "will change the economy of SE communities with a novel transportation option that doesn't exist right now."

"UAS is pleased to provide Pacific Seaflight (www.pacificseaflight.com), an Alaskan LLC, with space in our facility that will support their business to bring 'wing-in-ground-effect' (WIG) transportation to SE Alaska," said UAS Chancellor John Pugh. Among other things, UAS will support the new venture with campus facilities for training operators and maintenance crews for the vessels, also known as "wingships."

Pacific Seaflight will have as many as seven Blue Dolphin wingships in SE Alaska and three in Cook Inlet by 2009, beginning with three based in Juneau in 2008. That service could contribute greatly to a more efficient, more reliable and less expensive way to transport people and cargo between communities often hampered by weather or expense, said Juneau Mayor Bruce Botelho. "Application of this technology is especially appropriate for our coastal environment because of its speed and reliability," Botelho added. The city of Haines and the SE Conference have also endorsed the new venture – both as a welcomed addition in transportation options but also in the venture's economic potential.

"The Blue Dolphin design and manufacturing process is being inspected by the US Coast Guard," said Pacific Seaflight President Linus Romey. "When the first wingships are delivered next summer, they will be fully certified as Inspected Passenger Vessels." Romey continued.

The wingships will carry up to 12 passengers and will fly just above the water's surface. "Unlike a hydrofoil or hovercraft, the Blue Dolphin is supported on a dynamic cushion of air between the water and the vessel's hull. "The Blue Dolphin, at 11 gallons per hour, is more economical and eco-friendly. It is just as quick (110 mph) as fixed wing aircraft but with a 30% savings on the cost of the ticket," Romey said. It is far less susceptible to poor weather cancellations and will be more convenient and timely than the ferry system. "Finally," Romey added, "wingships are less disruptive to surrounding wildlife than other options, with noise levels less than a dump truck (< 65 db at 100 meters) with no wake and no underwater impact whatsoever."

Pacific Seaflight, headquartered in Juneau, will be the only licensed training center for Blue Dolphin crews. UAS will provide the classrooms as well as space for operators to train on simulators, Romey said. "This will be a major economic boost in SE Alaska, hit hard by a loss of good-paying jobs. People we train will be highly paid, compared to many other local jobs," Romey added. "I anticipate that we'll train over four hundred operators and maintenance technicians in the next three years."

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