

Company intends to build amphibious planes in Brunswick

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An aircraft manufacturer that intends to build two-seat, amphibious planes designed in Finland for the North American market is poised to become the first company to build planes at the former Brunswick Naval Air Station, officials said Tuesday.

Finnish company Atol Avion announced at airshows in Florida and Germany the joint venture with a U.S.-based investor group to produce the planes at Brunswick Landing.

The Atol 650 will be built in Maine to serve the North American market, the world's largest for such aircraft, Atol USA President Paul Richards said.

"Finland has 188,000 lakes, so we know the joys of water flying, and the demands. Many of these lakes are remote and require range and reliability to access so we designed the 650 for this environment," Anssi Rekula, Atol Avion co-founder, said in a statement.

The plane is already undergoing European certification and will begin certification with the Federal Aviation Administration within 60 days, Richards said.

Because it falls under the "light sport aircraft" category, FAA certification is expected to be swift, though it'll still take about a year, he said.

Brunswick Landing already has about 10 aviation businesses.

Another amphibious airplane company, MVP Aero, hopes to build planes in Brunswick, but Atol is further along with a prototype that's been flying in Europe for more than a year, officials said.

Kestrel Aviation was one of the first aircraft makers to commit to Brunswick but moved production to Wisconsin because of tax breaks there. Some parts for jets are made in Brunswick after the company merged with Eclipse Aerospace to create One Aviation.

"We've taken what the Navy left us and elevated it a notch to attract aviation manufacturers," said Steve Levesque, executive director of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority, which is developing Brunswick Landing and Brunswick Executive Airport.

Brunswick Landing has been a success story for redevelopment of a military base.

The 3,200-acre Brunswick Naval Air Station, which closed in 2011, has been transformed into a business campus where more than 100 entities employ more than 1,200 workers. The dual, 8,000-foot runways are now part of Brunswick Executive Airport.

Richards said his company will employ 50 to 100 people when manufacturing ramps up. It will begin leasing space May 1 for its U.S. headquarters.

The company wouldn't be competing with established light aircraft manufacturers like Cessna, for example, he said. The Atol 650, he said, will cost less than a Cessna but won't be rated for commercial use, and it will be limited to two occupants.

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