

China rep visits MSU over aviation partnership

Contract still months away

By Robb Murray

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MANKATO — Minnesota State University moved a step closer to an official agreement to train Chinese pilots, but a firm contract is still probably months away.

Changdong Xu, a Chinese business leader, met with MSU President Richard Davenport, Provost Scott Olson, other Minnesota State administrators and North Star Aviation representatives Friday to discuss the proposed partnership.

The exchange would bring professionals and students from China for helicopter and fixedwing flight training at Mankato Regional Airport. Students would be taught by instructors for North Star Aviation. (North Star contracts with MSU to provide professional flight training as part of the aviation program.) The Chinese students would receive training for five aircraft ratings. When they finish the program, each would receive a completion certificate from MSU.

Davenport, who along with other MSU and airport officials will travel this summer to China to continue negotiations on the proposal, said the talks with Xu (pronounced "choo") represent a " very important public/ private partnership."

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Changdong Xu, a Chinese businessman, toured Minnesota State University Friday. He is working with MSU on a proposal to train Chinese pilots.

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"I think this partnership will be the first of its kind," Davenport said.

The idea of the partnership came from Richard Lehmann, president of China-America International Development Alliance, a

consulting firm that helps Chinese companies connect with companies and universities in the U.S.

Xu told Lehmann they needed to find a way to get 300 pilots a year to fill their demand, and Lehmann suggested they partner with an institution of higher learning.

“ This program (MSU's) appealed to me personally,” Lehmann said.

The Chinese connection is partly credited for saving MSU's aviation program.

Slated for elimination because of the state's dreadful budget situation, aviation — noted for its high cost and low student numbers — was to expire soon.

But a few weeks ago it was announced that business leaders had banded together and pledged about \$600,000 in financial support, enough to keep the program running for the next three years.

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