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Touchdown, Cd'A

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Several private jets are lined up at Resort Aviation Friday at the Coeur d'Alene Airport in Hayden. The aircraft belong to various members of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans who were in town attending a board meeting held by Duane Hagadone. Aerial services provided by Big Country Helicopters.

Like mammoth doves they perched at Coeur d'Alene Airport/Pappy Boyington Field.

Dwarfing nearby cars, the private jets looked a little out of place, a little lost, a little insulted to be sharing space with each other.

More were still roaring in. Early Friday morning a Boeing 737 swooped in, outlined in green and white with a Miami Dolphins helmet painted on the tail. After the stairs unfolded, a limousine pulled into the airport.

Traveling can be such a pain.

The airport in Hayden saw an unusual parade of customers this week, when it hosted 24 private jets belonging to members of one of the world's most exclusive clubs.

No pressure.

"I'd call it business different than usual," airport Manager Greg Delavan said with a laugh.

Roughly 120 global leaders, celebrities and entrepreneurs were in Coeur d'Alene this week to attend a meeting of the philanthropy group Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, Inc., hosted by board member Duane Hagadone. The attendee list included entrepreneur T. Boone Pickens, former U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Nicholson, and owner of the Miami Dolphins Wayne Huizenga, who has founded three Fortune 500 companies.

Some dropped by in their personal aircraft, bringing in the highest collection of private jets in one group the airport has ever seen, Delavan said.

"He (Duane Hagadone) calls me and says he's having a board meeting in town," Delavan said. "Frankly, he told me he's got 10 billionaires in town."

That meant a daunting view of colossal jets congregating by the runway, the collection including a Gulfstream III, IV and V, a Falcon 900 and Bombardier BD-700.

The largest, the Boeing 737, boasted a roughly 120-foot wingspan and 140-foot length.

The impressive fleet didn't hinder air traffic at all, Delavan said.

"The biggest concern we've had is the parking problem. Where do you put 'em all?" he said, adding that the airport made plenty of room on two ramps.

Although the airport sees private jets come through often, Delavan said, it's rare for them to spend a few nights like these did.

The airport took extra precautions, he said, ensuring ample space and extra night security to protect the crafts he estimates range up to \$90 million.

The jets have provided an extra windfall with all the fuel purchases, Delavan added.

"They use thousands of gallons of fuel, and we get 5 cents per gallon," he said.

Many of the jets left Thursday night after a party that evening, Delavan said. The rest were scheduled to leave today.

The Horatio Alger Association is a nonprofit comprised of members of global renown. The group provides scholarships to students who have overcome adversity.

Delavan was happy the airport could accommodate such prestigious travelers, he said.

"The world's richest people don't arrive in Coeur d'Alene by bus," he said.