

Another loud noise explained in the Riverbend

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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BETHALTO - St. Louis Regional Airport in East Alton is no stranger to strange things, airport manager Dave Miller said Wednesday afternoon.

Several residents living near the airport said they heard abundantly loud sounds late Wednesday morning. One person even said the noise shook her house after describing the noise like a "jet engine going off and on for about 10 minutes straight." In fact, the sound was exactly that. An F-18 fighter jet unexpectedly landed at the airport Wednesday morning to refuel.

Miller said the occurrence was odd and unexpected, but is nothing with which to be concerned. He said the airport has a contract with the Department of Defense to provide fuel when needed, and said the F-18 was on a transcontinental trip and needed to refuel. He said no munitions were attached to the jet at the time of the refueling, adding anything seen externally attached to it was most likely additional fuel tanks for the trip.

"We used to have F-18's from Boeing come in here to do test flights, but we don't really do that anymore," Miller said. "This particular situation involved a jet on a transcontinental jog. Throughout any given month, there are at least a few things that occur. We had a P-51 Mustang replica come in here bad broke. We fixed it up and sent it out yesterday."

While Miller said the jet maintained an altitude of at least 2,000 feet above the residential area during its flight (outside of take off and landing), he said the roar of the jet's engine would be impossible to restrict.

"They are military aircraft, so they are exempt from all the noise reduction stuff," he said. "You don't go into combat with anything restricting power."

Because of that, the jet's engines and afterburners, which are utilized in take-off and landing, Miller said, caused quite the sound during the fighter's short stint at the airport.

Usually, Miller said the airport's unexpected guests are blimp and balloon crews, who are also on transcontinental flight patterns. He said many blimps are in the area not to film games, but instead to take a small break between coasts to refuel or give their crews some much-needed downtime. Recently, he said a blimp had landed for five or six days, just so it would not arrive at the East Coast too early.

"We have gained popularity among the blimp crews for some reason," Miller said. "We have hotels around here and everything they need, and we're right outside the high-density-traffic area from Mid-America to Lambert over to Spirit Airport. We're tangent to it, but we're not a part of it."