

Press Release

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CHICAGO-STYLE CELEBRATION WELCOMES NONSTOP SERVICE BETWEEN MONTEREY REGIONAL AIRPORT AND CHICAGO O'HARE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT ON UNITED AIRLINES

Fun and Festive Event Marks Inaugural Service to the No. 1 Requested Destination by Monterey Region Locals and Visitors

MONTEREY, CA, May 23, 2026 - The [Monterey Regional Airport](#) (MRY) team, partners, and community members today welcomed nonstop service to Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD) on [United Airlines](#). The new route was hailed as a "game changer" for MRY as Chicago is the top destination requested by Monterey Region local and visiting travelers and for ORD's easy one-stop flight connections to East Coast and European destinations. Learn more by visiting montereyairport.com.

Flight launch festivities included ribbon cuttings at the boarding gate for both the arriving and departing flights; a Laguna Seca-sponsored Ford Raptor as the "follow me" vehicles guiding United's arriving aircraft to the gate; and a picnic celebration—with Chicago-style hot dogs, deep-dish and thin-crust pizza, popcorn, and beverages; and Italian beef sliders—on MRY's open-air Observation Deck with a view to the airside flight activities.

A music playlist featuring Chicago artists and songs about the Windy City curated by local KRML radio General Manager Jeff White energized the event vibe.

To recognize Chicago's legendary sports spirit, guests joined in trivia and corn hole games, wore their favorite team apparel to celebrate the love of the game, all while the Chicago Cubs home game played live on nearby televisions.

"What a fantastic day and way to celebrate nonstop service between Monterey Regional Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport. Our residents and visitors have been asking for nonstop service between the Monterey Region and Chicago for years, and we are pleased to deliver this convenient flight in time for summer travel," said **Dino Pick, Chair of the Monterey Peninsula Airport District Board (MPAD) of Directors**.

"This is yet another milestone achieved by MPAD Board members and tourism and business partners, who prioritize enhancing air service in and out of MRY for our community. It also indicates United Airlines' confidence in our Central Coast market, and we thank our airline partner for their support, service, and investment in our region," Pick continued.

Event guests, speakers, and those participating in the ribbon-cutting ceremonies included local elected officials, including **Congressman Jimmy Panetta** (CA-19); MPAD board members; United Airlines' administrative staff and flight crew members; Monterey Region tourism representatives, including from See Monterey, Visit Carmel, Monterey Bay Aquarium, and local hotels; regional city council members and mayors; local chambers of commerce representatives; MRY administrative staff; and local residents and business owners.

"We're excited to provide the Monterey community with the first direct flight to Chicago in nearly 50 years with the launch of our seasonal service starting today," said **Mark Weithofer, United's Managing Director of Domestic Network Planning**. "This new flight unlocks the opportunity for travelers from Chicago and all across the country to explore the iconic sights and coastal views of Monterey, while connecting local residents to United's expansive route network from our hub in Chicago."

United Airlines Captain Kyle Patton, who was born, raised, and attended schools in the Monterey region, piloted the inaugural MRY-ORD flight with his family members onboard and participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony along with other flight crew members. Patton began his flying career while in high school, taking flight lessons at MRY over 30 years ago.

"When the opportunity arose to fly the inaugural departing flight from MRY, I immediately said yes. Operating this specific flight holds special significance to me," Patton remarked.

"Monterey area locals and travel and tourism partners are enthusiastically welcoming new nonstop service between the Central Coast and Chicago," said **Monterey Regional Airport Executive Director Chris Morello**. "Travelers now have easy access to flights between our two in-demand tourism destinations, saving them time, money, and hassle as they no longer have to drive to or connect through other Bay Area airports to take a nonstop flight."

"I encourage our community to book the flight this summer, whether to visit family and friends in the Chicago area or to explore the exciting and energetic Windy City. The more the flight is used, the more reasons United Airlines will have to extend the service beyond the peak summer travel season," Morello continued.

Passengers on the first flights were welcomed with an inaugural flight-branded reusable tote, which were chock-full of event-themed souvenirs, including other plushies, chocolate truffles, wellness patches, lip balm charcuterie boxes, retro hats, and aviator sunglasses.

"This new nonstop flight is more than just added air service — it's a direct connection between two iconic destinations and a major step forward for Monterey County," said **Rob O'Keefe, President & CEO of See Monterey**. "Chicago has been an important growth market for us, and we're already seeing strong demand from travelers looking for the kind of inspiring coastal experiences that Monterey County offers. This route makes it easier than ever for visitors from the Midwest to access our region while creating meaningful economic opportunity for our hotels, restaurants, and local businesses."

"Having grown up in Chicago, this new nonstop flight to Monterey is especially meaningful to me personally," said **Amy Herzog, Executive Director of Visit Carmel**. "For years, I've hoped for - and worked with my tourism colleagues toward - a direct connection between these two incredible destinations. Chicago travelers have long appreciated Carmel-by-the-Sea's natural beauty, culinary scene, and coastal charm, and this new service makes experiencing our community easier and more seamless than ever. We're thrilled to welcome even more visitors from the Midwest to discover everything that makes this corner of California so special."

The arriving flight is strategically scheduled to land at MRY just before noon, allowing travelers ample time to check into local hotels and explore the Monterey Region or create new memories with family and friends.

The flight to ORD departs in the early afternoon, with an evening arrival to enjoy a late dinner in Chicago or connect on one of numerous flight options out of ORD.

United Airlines	MRY to ORD FLIGHT #485 (4 hours, 34 minutes)	ORD to MRY FLIGHT #445 (4 hours, 49 minutes)
Scheduled Departure Time (CST)	-	8:40 AM
Scheduled Arrival Time (PST)	-	11:29 AM
Scheduled Departure Time (PST)	2:06 PM	-
Scheduled Arrival Time (CST)	8:40 PM	-

Please visit [unitedairlines.com](https://www.unitedairlines.com) to confirm schedules and book flights.

United is operating Boeing 737-800 aircraft seating 166 passengers on the route with a three-cabin configuration (United Economy, Economy Plus, and United First). The service is currently scheduled to operate on Saturdays through August 15, 2026.

The passenger and community celebrations at the boarding gate and Observation Deck honored a number of milestones for event partners and the community, including 100 years of United Airlines service, MRY’s 85 years of service, and the return of nonstop Chicago service to the Monterey Region after 45 years.

Learn more about MRY and the new service to ORD at montereyairport.com.

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About See Monterey

See Monterey is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization that drives tourism for Monterey County. Tourism is the largest industry on the Monterey Peninsula and the second largest in the county. See Monterey is a partnership of the hospitality community and local governments that aims to generate community prosperity and enrich economic vitality for Monterey County through the responsible growth of the tourism economy. In 2025, travel spending in Monterey County was \$3.3 billion, supporting nearly 28,000 jobs and generating \$346 million in state and local tax revenue that directly benefited the community. For more information, visit SeeMonterey.com and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

About Visit Carmel

Visit Carmel is the official destination marketing organization promoting Carmel-by-the-Sea as a world-renowned, storybook destination. From inspiring restaurants and wine tasting rooms to boutique shops, art galleries, and the famous Carmel Beach, visitors can explore it all within walking distance of Carmel’s charming hotels and inns. For more information visit www.CarmelCalifornia.com and follow @VisitCarmel on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

About Monterey Regional Airport

Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) is Monterey County’s only commercial service airport and accommodates over 650,000 passengers each year. The airport serves 11 nonstop markets with an average of 17 daily departures. MRY is committed to providing customers with superior services and a convenient, hassle-free experience in a safe, secure, and professional environment. The MRY Metamorphosis, an FAA-required Safety Enhancement Program, includes a replacement passenger terminal that will welcome passengers in early summer 2027, and will transform how Monterey residents and visitors travel. Be sure to visit montereyairport.com and @montereyairport on Facebook, Instagram, and X.