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U.S. Rep. James L. Oberstar wins Tony Jannus Award for commercial aviation

By Steve Huettel, Times Staff Writer
In Print: Friday, May 8, 2009

Aviation buffs pick winners for the annual Tony Jannus Award that tend to favor airline bigwigs, the bigger the better.

Think of past recipients: Virgin Atlantic's Sir Richard Branson, Herb Kelleher of Southwest, JetBlue founder David Neeleman and Continental chief executive Larry Kellner.

So a few eyebrows went up at Thursday's announcement of the 2009 winner: U.S. Rep. James L. Oberstar, the veteran Minnesota Democrat and chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

It doesn't hurt to be on the good side of the guy who's crafting the House's new six-year funding bill for highways, trains and other surface transportation. And who suggested Oberstar? Norman Mineta, who won the award while serving as transportation secretary in 2004.

The award is named after the pilot of the first scheduled commercial flight, which was from St. Petersburg to Tampa in 1914, and honors significant contributions to commercial aviation.

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