SUMMER 2020

Business Aviation Magazine

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• PRESIDENT •

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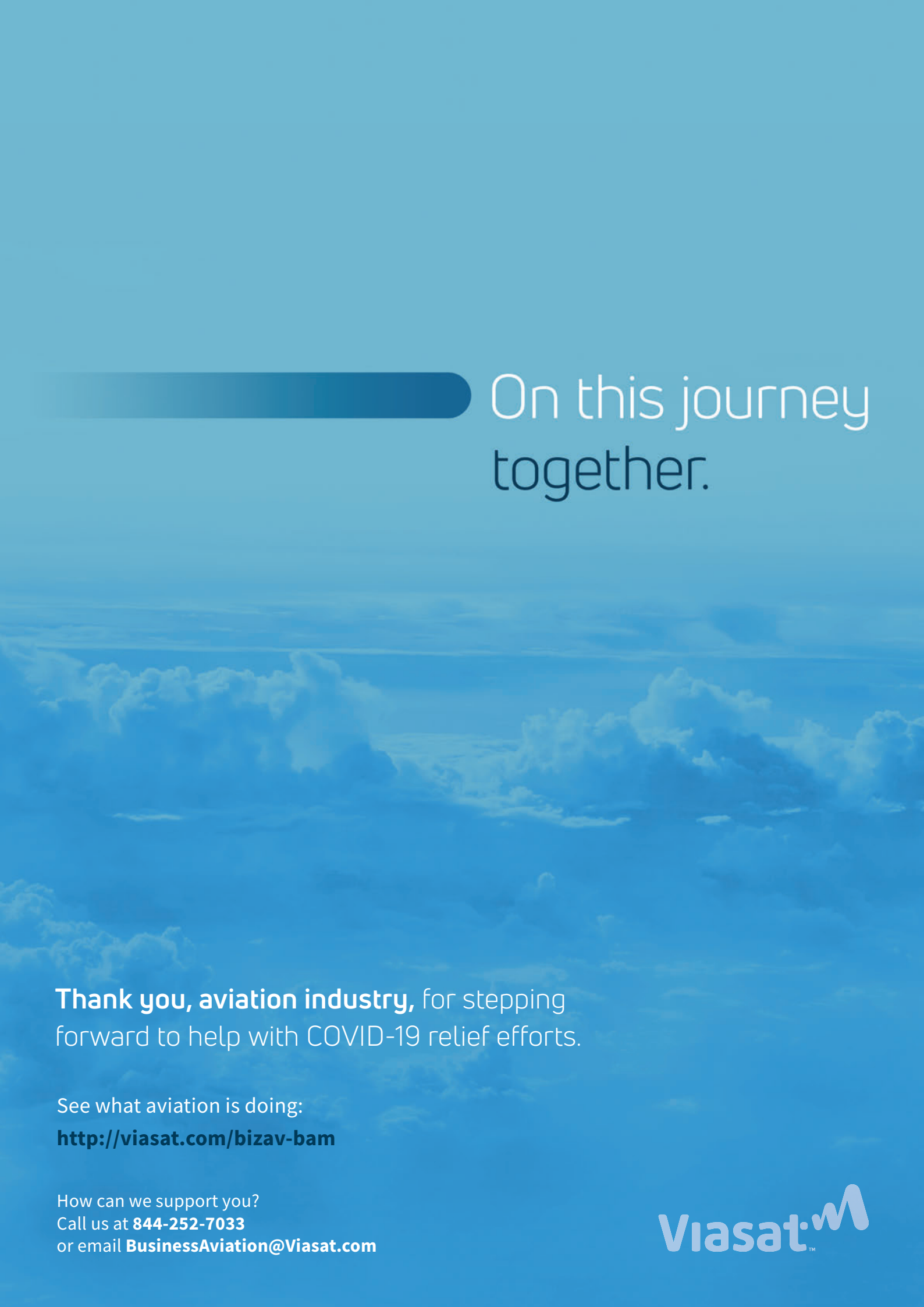
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SUMMER OF RESILIENCE

If we were not still in the middle of a global pandemic this editorial would probably have had at least a section devoted to the market uncertainties that tend to characterise a US Presidential election year. Instead, COVID-19 is front and centre, and the fact that Joe Biden has won the Democratic nomination to go head to head against Donald Trump for the Presidency barely registers by comparison.

Instead, we have hundreds of hours of TV and media time devoted either to the pandemic or to the riots in 40 American cities over the murder of a black man, George Floyd, by a white Minneapolis policeman – plus the supporting protests against racism which this has sparked around the world.

The commercial aviation sector has taken a terrible battering and has been shedding jobs to the left and to the right. But on the plus front, the easing of lockdown around the world is creating a real sense of optimism. It's beginning to look as if maybe business aviation will actually get an NBAA-BACE in October, after all.

What is heartening, as one sees again and again from the interviews in this issue, is that business aviation may have been bruised by the pandemic, but it certainly is showing its mettle. Flight hours might be way down, especially in the bigger jets segments, but business has been going on all the same.

For our part, we are delighted to have been able to provide the industry with another great line-up of senior executive interviews. Their thoughts on the current crisis are invaluable.

Company after company has found ways of keeping the doors open and retaining their staff along with all the skills and abilities that their people bring to the game. Most are ready to go full steam ahead again as soon as circumstances permit.

This is truly a highly resilient industry. Our fortunes are inextricably linked to business cycles, but we also make our own luck through hard work, innovation and ingenuity. At BAM we are looking forward to seeing everyone again at NBAA, or whenever the next BACE happens. Keep safe, keep well!

ANTHONY HARRINGTON

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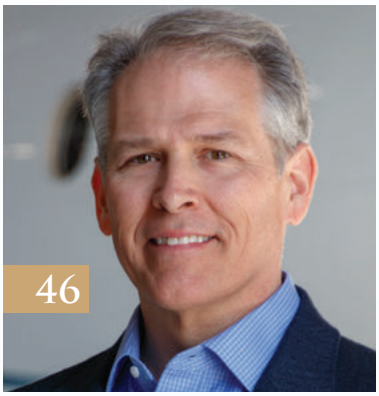

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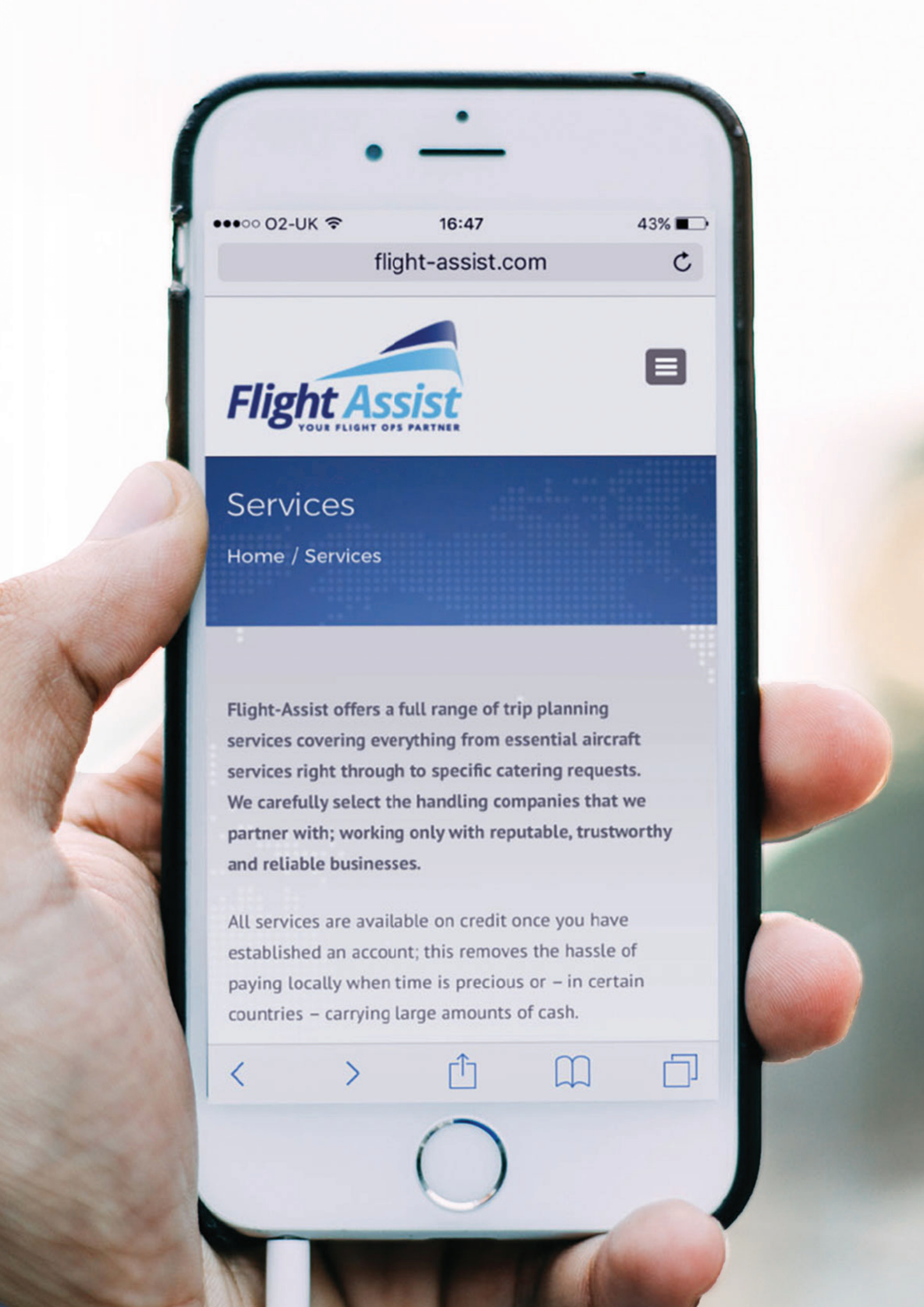
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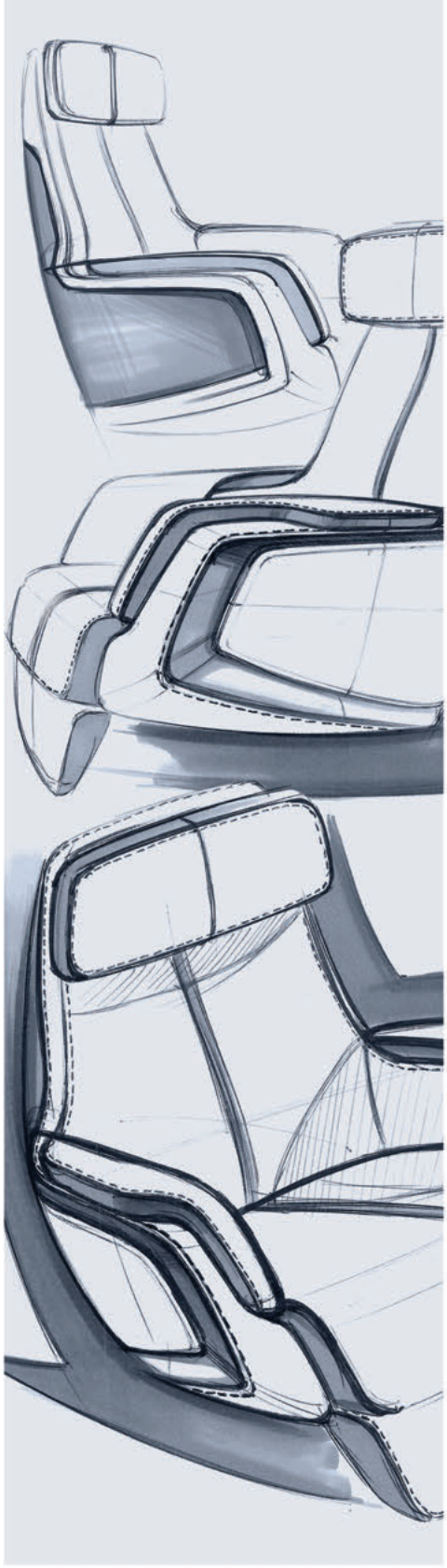

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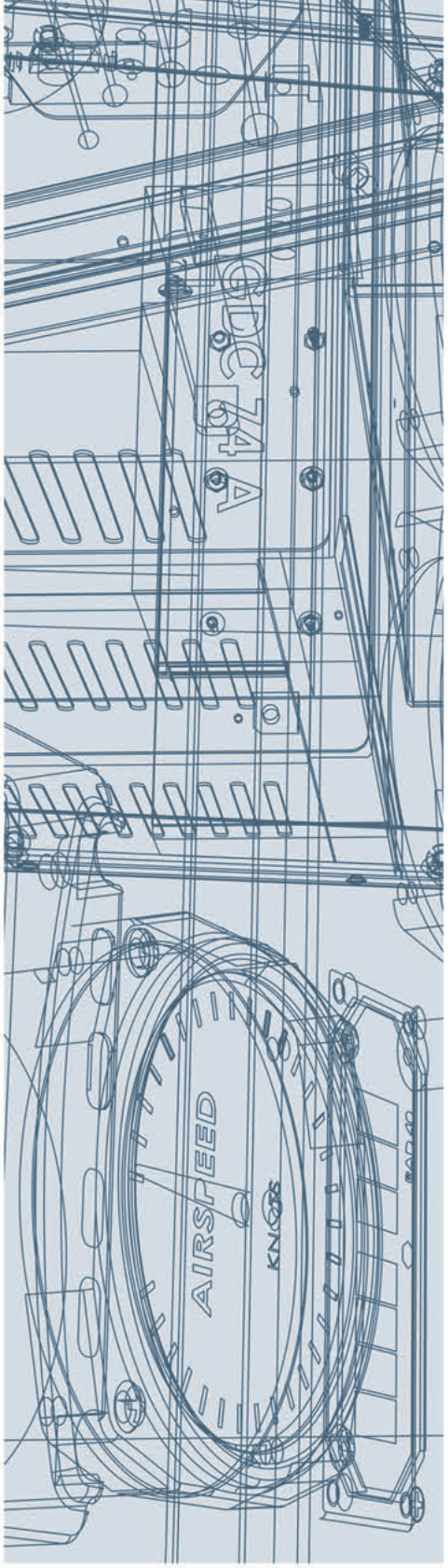

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BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Jarid King, President of King Aerospace, talks about leading the company out of shutdown and growing the business in the 'new normal'

"In 2018 we did 29 projects on Boeing jets, up to Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft. In 2019 we grew that number to 40 projects, which was tremendous year-on-year growth."

Jarid King, President, King Aerospace

Young Jarid King

Jerry King, Chairman and Founder, King Aerospace

AH: Jarid, King Aerospace is now in its third decade. How did it all begin?

JK: Jerry King, my father, was the President of Associated Air Center until he left and started King Aerospace in his home office/garage in 1992. I was 3 years old. He won a government contract to help maintain and operate two De Havilland Dash 8 aircraft based at Tyndall Air Force Base near Panama City, Florida. These aircraft supported a missile testing range.

About a year later, he opened King Aerospace Commercial Corporation, in Ardmore, Oklahoma, in order to get back to doing VIP aircraft. The logic for starting this business became apparent when he was earning his master's degree. As part of the degree program, he did a survey of the cost of hangars and labour. That brought Ardmore's old World War II bomber base to his attention.

In addition to its 9,000-foot runway and big hangars, the site had plenty of land around it for future development and growth. It also had the advantage of little traffic for security and privacy-concerned VIP folks to worry about. My dad already had well developed contacts with the US Armed Forces and this has grown and grown. We now provide services to the Department of Defense as well as to other US agencies, such as the Department of Energy, the Coast Guard and the Army.

Our family-owned business, which began so humbly, now operates in Dallas, TX; Ardmore, OK; El Paso, TX; Albuquerque, NM; Camp Humphreys, Korea; and 24/7 logistics outposts around the world.

AH: When did your involvement with the company take off?

JK: I joined the company full-time in 2013, after working in the family business on holidays and suchlike. After graduating from college I did a two-year rotation through both our companies, gaining experience in every department. I spent time in the paint shop, in aircraft management and maintenance. Then I moved into sales and took on more of an executive role. In 2016, I was named President, and that is the role I occupy today.

AH: What are you doing on the VIP side of the business?

JK: We provide a full suite of services to VIP aircraft. In 2018 we did 29 projects on Boeing jets, up to Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft. In 2019 we grew that number to 40 projects, which was tremendous year-on-year growth. I'm proud to add that we accomplished that while achieving a 100 percent on-time delivery rate for this work. We will probably not see as many of these projects in 2020 with the COVID pandemic, but we expect the size of the projects being brought to us to keep on increasing.

> "Today, we are focusing more on the maintenance and interior refurbishment work for Boeing aircraft."

Predominantly, we are working on BBJs, mostly for US-based operators, but also for some foreign operators. We are recognized in the Boeing handbook as an authorized maintenance and modifications center and that has helped bring us to the attention of more non-US-based operators and owners.

We also have a very good customer base in the corporate sector on the paint side. We do a lot of work for Textron Aviation and its Cessna aircraft. We forecast around 45 to 50 paint jobs a year, with perhaps five or six of these jobs including substantial interior refurbishment work.

Today, we are focusing more on the maintenance and interior refurbishment work for Boeing aircraft. In fact, we are starting on the development of a new 90,000-square-foot hangar to support the capacity growth that we are seeing here. That adds 45 percent more hangar space to our Ardmore campus.

AH: How has the pandemic affected your operation and what is your view looking forward?

JK: Right from the outset we followed the safety guidelines set out. The safety and well-being of our employees is absolutely our top priority. Any of our staff who fell into the more vulnerable categories, either through age or through some ongoing medical issue, we moved to working from home. We continue to pay all our staff. We want to retain their talents and make sure we get them all back healthy.

Obviously, COVID-19 has caused a lot of uncertainty in the market as to what the impact on projects will be. Not all of this has been bad. We have seen customers bring projects in early to us. For some, the focus has been on getting the aircraft flight ready early, so that it can be used for humanitarian missions. We do our best to expedite delivery dates so they can get these missions done.

On the plus side, the governor decided that from the start of May, Texas would begin opening up a little. We're currently doing our own soft re-entry from the 'shelter at home' provisions. We're getting small numbers of staff coming in on a shift basis, with social distancing being carefully observed. We prefer erring on the cautious side, so we are running two shifts with reduced numbers.

The virus has also had an impact on our government and defense work. We have people overseas, in the Middle East,

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supporting government aircraft. We have about 50 employees in South Korea. We just took on additional work there, and getting people into and out of that country has been a challenge with the travel restrictions. We're supporting the US Army there. Our paint shop is active and is seeing a good throughput of aircraft. Our technicians typically rotate out after 70 days. Some are now almost doubling that. Their sacrifice, being away from home for such extended periods, supports their mission-critical support. They are heroes.

AH: How important is aircraft sales to your business?

JK: Sales are the lifeblood of an organization like ours. Our executive VP of sales has responsibility for that area and I take a keen interest in it. We have an excellent sales team.

AH: How does your business break down in terms of the split between government and business aviation?

JK: On the VIP side, probably 70% of our work is government and military-based, while 30% is private, mainly supporting heavier jets. We also have around 50 corporate aircraft that we look after. Our mix of business generates a good revenue stream that is a bit less subject to cyclical highs and lows.

AH: On the sales side, do you take in inventory to sell on?

JK: We do not carry a large inventory ourselves to sell. Our aim is to enable transactions for our clients. Maintenance continues to be a key part of what we do. On a BBJ for example, we provide everything from a B-check to the heaviest C-check inspections and 12-year requirements. We can do anything that the client needs.

We have a very large technical team here at King Aerospace. In 2019 we were involved in a project with Boeing as part of the Department of Defense Mentor Protégé Program. It pairs prime contractors with smaller ones. The 12-month program spanned a variety of leadership and business improvement training sessions guided by the kaizen continuous-improvement philosophy of change for the better.

This project also involved critical interior outfitting of a head-of-state aircraft. Boeing even dubbed our support the Hero Project because of the way we turned things around. The work was significantly behind schedule. We tackled it by developing a highly detailed plan that guided avionics and interiors teams that worked in unison for maximum efficiency. The customer thought we had worked miracles. Our teamwork and processes saved the day.

Boeing recently named us one of 10 Suppliers of the Year because of the strength of our collaboration with them. I'm proud of our no-excuses, get-it-done team and how we take care of our customers. The award means a great deal to us.

AH: You put tremendous stock in your company culture. Why is that?

JK: Just the other day we received a phone call from one of Hawaii's largest air cargo services, Transair. One of our customers had referred them to us for avionics work. But Transair wasn't just looking for someone with the technical know-how. They wanted a partner who problem solves, communicates honestly and sees things through to a successful completion. That doesn't happen without the right culture.

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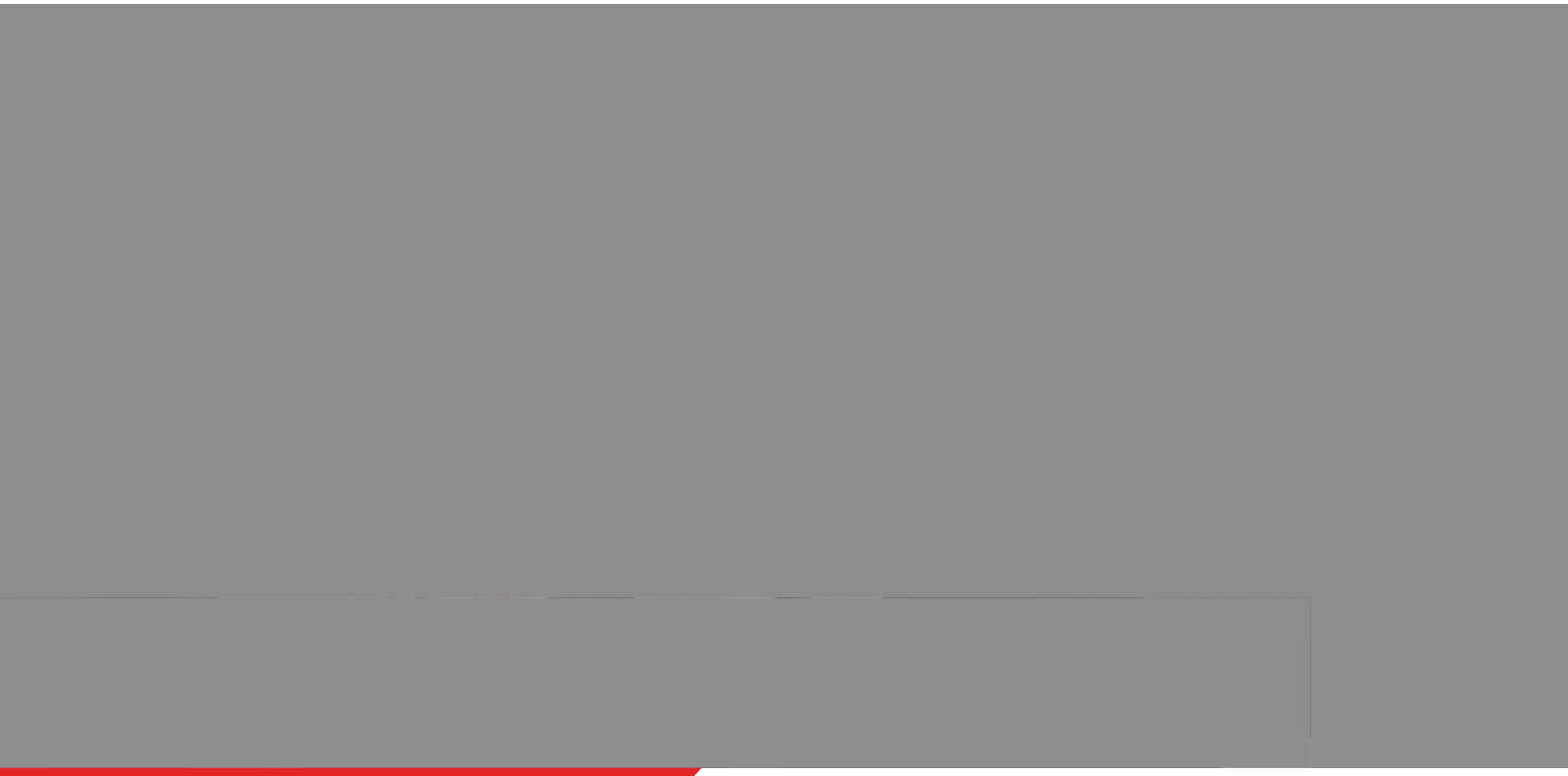

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AH: It's easy to say that you deliver quality in everything. It's another thing to do it. How do you?

JK: From the beginning, we based our service on God, Country and Family and on making a positive difference in the lives of others. Having clear priorities and understanding that success is not achieved alone, have enabled us to maintain one of the industry's highest customer satisfaction rates. We really listen to our customers, understand their challenges and work together openly and transparently to deliver on target, on time and on budget.

Whether we're working on a VVIP aircraft or in demanding special-mission environments on the other side of the world, our team operates as servant leaders. That transforms what we do. We talk a lot about purpose and our "why." What we do is bigger than our individual roles.

AH: How do you generate buy-in from your team?

JK: You see the wings we wear on our shirts. Those are earned. They can also be taken away. Our Cornerstone Principles address everything from respect and trust to a team orientation and problem-solving attitude.

We establish volunteer-based, King Kulture™ committees at each of our locations. They are driven by front-line team members rather than management, which fosters authenticity. This isn't about lip-service.

AH: How do you acknowledge a team member has demonstrated he or she has what it takes?

JK: When a candidate has been approved by their peers, we hold a wings ceremony in front of the entire team. Customers often attend. Everyone does their part to keep our gold wings shining brightly. This unity of purpose makes us more than a team. We're family.

AH: As a 30-year-old, second-generation leader, you seem amazingly clear about your competitive advantage.

JK: Yes, and I thank my father for that. I've heard it from him my entire life. Our people and their passion set us apart from the competition. We just happen to work on airplanes. |BAM

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Turbulence-free transactions

Mark Rogers, President, and founder of Lone Mountain Aircraft, talks to Anthony Harrington about the best ways of achieving "turbulence-free" transactions for clients

Mark Rogers founded Lone Mountain Aircraft Sales (LMA) in 2008, becoming one of the partners with Cirrus Aircraft as a pre-owned resale partner. Since the launch of LMA, the business has grown to a staff of 40 with regional offices in Dayton, Las Vegas, and Atlanta. LMA has become the largest reseller of Cirrus Aircraft and has expanded into several other popular general aviation aircraft, including turboprops and light jets.

In 2012, Mark led the opening of the Lone Mountain Aircraft Maintenance facility at the Warren County Airport near Dayton. This new capability complements the sales endeavors with airframe and power plant maintenance including overhauls of the Cirrus Airframe Parachute system.

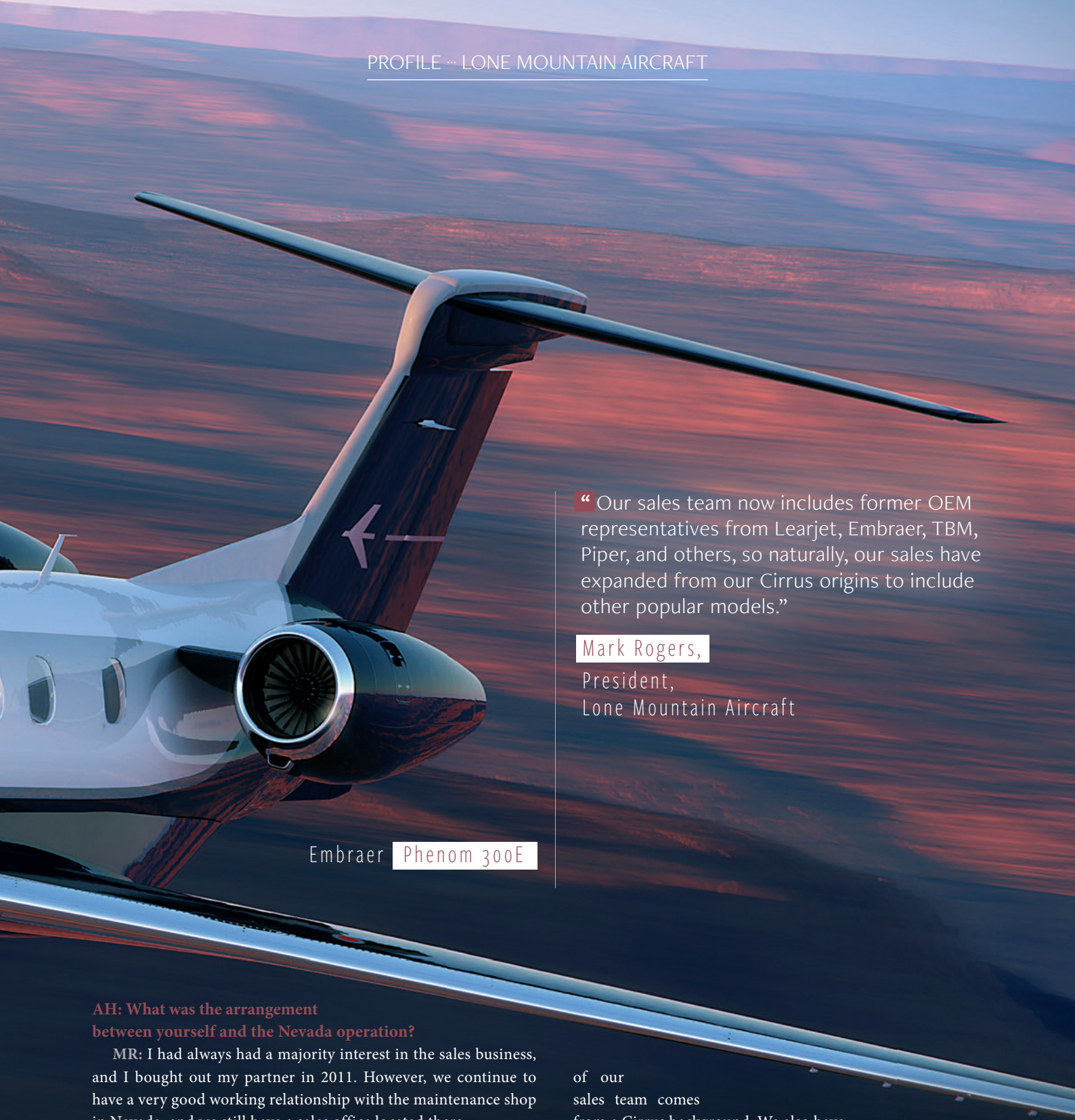
In 2014 Mark further expanded the business into aircraft finance, offering in-house aircraft financing solutions for clients of LMA.

AH: Building a successful operation in business aviation is always a huge undertaking. How did you get started, Mark?

MR: I founded the company in 2008, just as the global financial crisis began to really set in. That might not seem like a very good time to have taken such a step. However, in hindsight, it was probably a lot better than, say, starting it two years earlier. If I'd done that, I would most likely have gone into the downturn carrying a lot of inventory and that might not have been survivable for a new company.

At the time, we had the opportunity to partner with Lone Mountain Aviation Maintenance in Nevada. I had been working with a reputable broker and dealer in Indiana, so I had a strong sales record behind me. The Nevada operation was interested in adding a sales dimension to their operation, so the partnership worked well for both of us, despite the harsh market conditions.

Most importantly, the Nevada operation was an authorized Cirrus maintenance center, so that gave me a good way forward to pursue additional Cirrus sales.



> "Our sales team now includes former OEM representatives from Learjet, Embraer, TBM, Piper, and others, so naturally, our sales have expanded from our Cirrus origins to include other popular models."
>
> Mark Rogers,
> President,
> Lone Mountain Aircraft

Embraer Phenom 300E

AH: What was the arrangement between yourself and the Nevada operation?

MR: I had always had a majority interest in the sales business, and I bought out my partner in 2011. However, we continue to have a very good working relationship with the maintenance shop in Nevada, and we still have a sales office located there.

AH: So, what is the company structure now?

MR: Our headquarters is in South West Ohio, and we also have an aircraft maintenance facility there that I started in 2012. In addition, we have sales representatives based in London, Connecticut, Knoxville, Detroit, Ohio, Lincoln, Chicago, and Las Vegas. Today, we are one of the leading resellers of high-performance owner-flown aircraft, and we are the highest volume Cirrus reseller.

AH: You sell a wide range of turboprop and light jet aircraft. What percentage of what you do comes down to Cirrus sales?

MR: Cirrus represents about 60% of our unit volume, and half of our sales team comes from a Cirrus background. We also have extensive experience in the owner-flown turbines, which would include the Meridian, TBM, Mustangs, CJs, and Phenoms, along with the new Cirrus Vision Jet.

Our sales team now includes former OEM representatives from Learjet, Embraer, TBM, Piper, and others, so naturally, our sales have expanded from our Cirrus origins to include other popular models.

AH: How has the Coronavirus, or COV-19, impacted your set-up?

MR: So far, from a revenue perspective, its impact on

sales has not been as bad as I was anticipating. Our sales, as of the start of April through to end-April, have been running at half the normal rate, but the good thing is that there are still sales happening. Our refinancing opportunities are active with the low rate environment, and our aircraft management and maintenance businesses have not been adversely impacted.

When this all began at the beginning of March, I was telling myself that I might as well take the rest of March and all of April off on holiday. But surprisingly, while we have taken extensive measures to protect our staff and to enable home working, the impact has not been as devastating as we were expecting.

Of course, it is now much more challenging to deliver airplanes since the shelter in place restrictions were issued. It is also next to impossible to get buyers out to see the aircraft they want to buy. However, in Ohio, we heard that the shelter-in-place restrictions were due to be lifted on 3 May, with a further easing on 12 May. We are looking in this State at an incremental and measured return. Each state, however, is going to be different in how it emerges from shelter-in-place.

AH: What is your feeling about NBAA? Will it happen or won't it happen?

MR: I recently received a notice from a major manufacturer saying that they have already decided that they will not be there and have informed their client base accordingly. I would be disappointed if it was cancelled. It is something I always look forward to.

AH: How well do you think the industry will come out of the present crisis?

MR: For sure, by the end of the year, all of us will have been adversely impacted in some way or another. I do not think that as an industry we will emerge unscathed. From a volume standpoint, this will have to have some negative impact on aircraft valuations.

However, there are two sides to this coin. Travel demands will be lower. There is no doubt that aircraft movements will be down in 2020, for business aviation as well as for commercial aviation. However, business travel demand is expected to return first. Private aircraft provide a more attractive option, to those who can afford it, to commercial airlines, and increasingly so with the current situation.

From a volume standpoint, Covid-19 will undoubtedly have an impact no question. The OEMs are already cutting production and those cuts will likely not be made up through 2020 once restrictions are lifted and lockdown goes away. There is no hope of replacing that lost production, so the number of new aircraft that we were expecting in 2020 will be down, inevitably, and the only question now is by how much.

We would not be surprised to see demand return in the second half of 2020. We are already seeing more inquiries from first time buyers exploring travel alternatives.

AH: Completing aircraft transactions remains a challenge. What is your approach?

MR: We coined the term, 'turbulence-free transactions' to describe what we offer to clients. This is something we

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strive to deliver as a brand promise. A lot of aspects go into this, including a knowledgeable sales team, a strong operations team, and a full-time operations and aircraft financing team in Ohio. We have a number of former OEM representatives on the staff.

Having a finance team in house that can provide aircraft financing is another big part of smoothing transactions for customers, as is the fact that we have our own maintenance department. This allows us to ensure that aircraft are ready to deliver on the agreed date.

However, we could not do what we do without a strong Escrow and Title partner, and this is where Clay Healey and AIC Title Service are so important to us.

AH: When did you first start using AIC Title Service?

MR: At NBAA, back in 2009, we came across a really strong escrow agent in Clay Healey, and the initial conversation went well. What really impressed us though was that AIC made the effort to travel from Oklahoma to our annual sales meeting. There they gave a presentation as to what they could do for us as a premium title and escrow service provider. We've been with them ever since.

The client can choose another escrow service, if that is what they want, but we always recommend AIC Title Service because of the level of communication they provide and the quality of the technology platform they offer. What they provide enables us to serve our clients the way we want to serve them.

What AIC has done recently that we are very excited about, and are already using, is their European Global Closing Room. We often do transactions in Europe and they provide the equivalent of escrow and title services through the Global Closing Room. We are already in our fifth European sale completed through the GCR and have been pleased with the service.

We had been looking for a solution in Europe that would offer us a service that was up to the standard that we enjoy with AIC here in the US, so that has been a real benefit. The GCR is a technology platform that allows all parties to the transaction to view the documents and instructions held, and which enables both parties to approve closing as well as releasing funds and documents. We have been waiting for this solution to be available in Europe and we are really glad to have it.

AH: You do a number of Angel Flights, Mark. Can you tell us about that?

MR: Angel Flights, and other similar organisations, arrange flights between volunteer pilots and people who need to travel, often for medical reasons such as to attend clinical trials.

Later today, we will be flying a patient who is based here in Ohio, to Boston. She's a young mother who is battling cancer. She was accepted into a clinical trial in Boston and needs to travel up there every other week for treatment. With her immune system compromised by the treatment, she can't risk flying commercially.

One such Angel organisation is Lifeline Pilots, out of Illinois, and we donate the use of the aircraft and our time, and all the expenses associated with the flight. It is a very gratifying thing to do.

There are a number of these "Angel Flight" organisations around the country. I do about one such flight a month these days, which is up from the three or four a year I used to do. I'm really keen to urge other aircraft owners to get involved in this. There are a lot of owner-pilots out there who are not aware of the good they could do by getting involved and donating their time and their aircraft from time to time.

On our tenth anniversary at Lone Mountain, we launched an initiative, Flying For Good, which had its own website. Through it, we donated money to public benefit flying organisations around the country. The initiative was that if you do an angel flight and send us photos and a write up, we'll donate $1000 to the organisation.

With this COVID pandemic, we are relaunching this and plan to make five such donations. I would love to see this extended into Europe. I would love to be donating to one of the public benefit flying organisations over there! BAM

"What AIC has done recently that we are very excited about, and are already using, is their European Global Closing Room."

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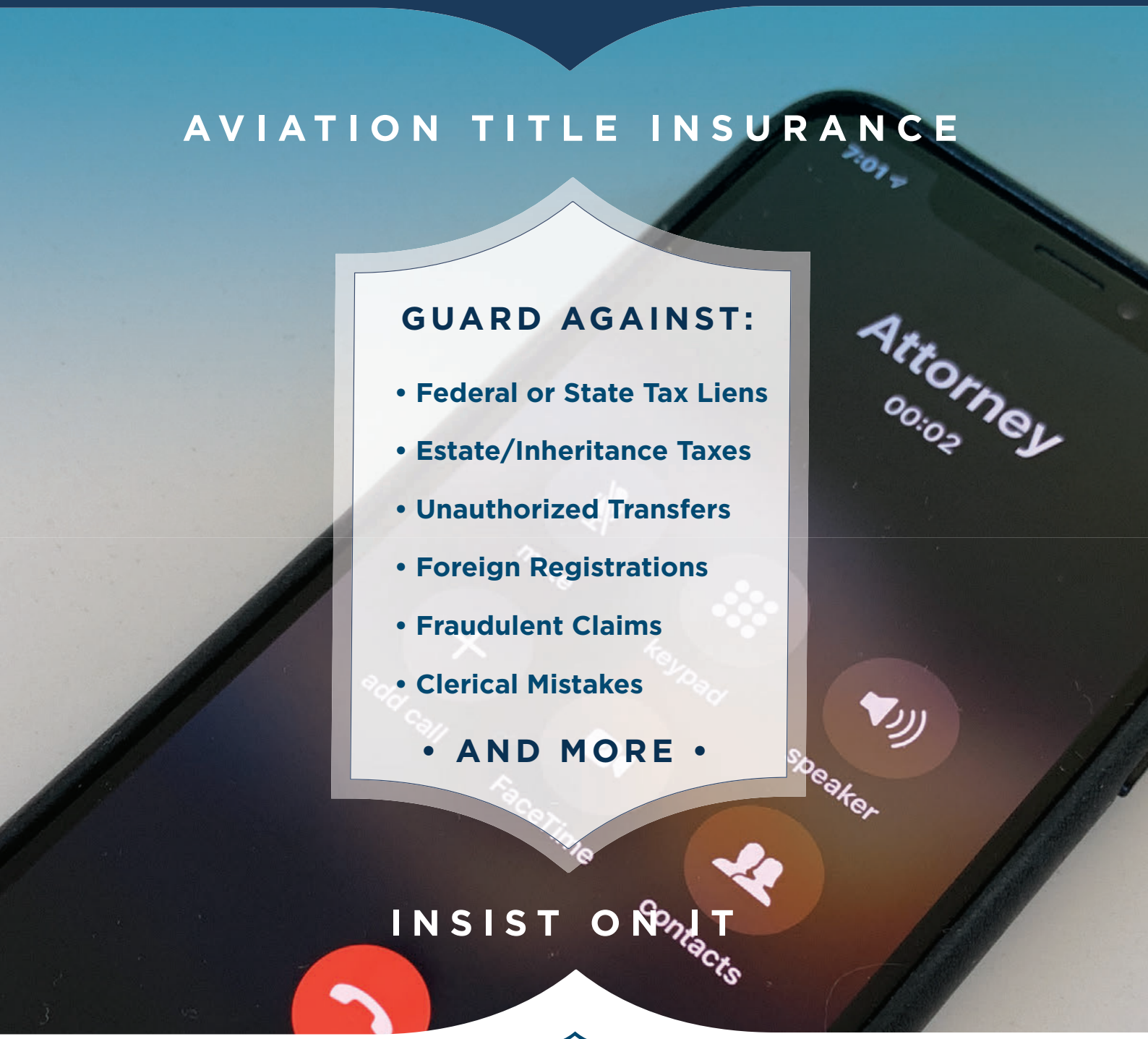

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Cause for Celebration

Andy Priester, President and CEO of Priester Aviation, on the company's 75th Anniversary

Priester Aviation was founded by George Priester in 1945 as a flight training school that eventually evolved into the multi-disciplinary aviation service company that it is today. As the aviation community developed and businesses began to expand globally, George Priester saw that the airplane was going to become the business vehicle of choice and anticipated the growth of the market.

The need for flexible point-to-point travel became a necessity and alternatives to commercial airline service were imperative. Priester's goal was to provide executives and other discerning travelers with premium aviation services, tailored to fit the individual needs of each client. Today, Priester operates a fleet of world-class aircraft and has a proud tradition of providing its clients with the same commitment it held 75 years ago.

AH: Andy, these are very difficult times for the whole industry. How is Priester Aviation doing and what are your expectations?

AP: Illinois is still under a stay at home order, as we speak. Basically, everyone in business, including in our industry, is doing what it takes to get through this period.

AH: In early May, one of the big unresolved questions as we look to the near future is whether matters will have improved enough for the NBAA Conference and Exhibition to take place in October or November. What are your thoughts?

AP: I think the most probable outcome is that NBAA will look a little different than in years past with a chance it could have a virtual component, out of an abundance of caution. Ed Bolen has done a really good job of leading the industry and behaving in responsible ways. I would think that by the Fall we should have our arms around the pandemic and be on a path to recovery, with businesses starting to return to normal. However, I do not see the public being confident enough for the usual 40,000 attendees to turn up at NBAA. Without the delegates, or with a greatly reduced attendance, the incentive to exhibit at NBAA will be weakened.

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The other thing that the NBAA leadership will have to take into account is that a number of the usual exhibitors, as they look at the damage to their revenue models in 2020, may well decide to skip it this year. They will have their sights on reducing costs and rebuilding, and that will perhaps weigh as much with some of them as safety issues.

AH: Priester Aviation has a tremendous history behind it. That must be a source of great pride to you.

AP: Absolutely. We are currently celebrating our 75th Anniversary and I couldn't be more delighted or more proud to continue the tradition. The company was founded by my grandfather, George Priester and I am the third generation. These are challenging times, but there is just as much pride in managing the organisation through a turbulent period as there is in managing in boom times.

AH: What were your early years in the company like?

AP: When I got out of College, I went into teaching. I was an eighth-grade science teacher and was on track to become a school principal. However, in 1997 I took a sabbatical from teaching to see if I would enjoy working in the family business. I'd grown up with it. The company was talked about constantly at the dinner table. I have a brother and three sisters and none of them were in the company, so if it was going to continue to be managed by the family it looked like it was down to me.

The family owned Pal-Waukee airport for years and finally sold it in the mid-1980s. Having started as a flight school, the business evolved into an FBO, with charter and aircraft ownership and maintenance among its services. However, in 2001 we sold everything apart from charter and aircraft management.

AH: What was the thinking behind the sale?

AP: The future for a sole FBO, trying to compete against the big FBO chains was always going to be an uphill battle, so we sold the FBO to Signature. Another reason underlying the sale was the change in refueling habits. Prop planes used to land and refuel as a matter of course. With more and more, longer range turbojets landing, as an FBO you were competing for fuel sales with the aircraft's previous and next stops. So, it was the right time to sell.

Andy Priester,
President and CEO,
Priester Aviation

George Priester,
Founder of Priester Aviation,
with family

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Aircraft management and providing top quality services to owners is now very much where our strengths lie. Relationships and a strong focus on integrity are the two most important factors that enable a business like ours to grow. The proof of this is that whereas in October 2001, after we had reshaped the business, we had seven aircraft under management, we now manage in the mid-50s.

AH: You clearly need a great team around you to manage that level of business.

AP: Absolutely. I know a lot about our business but there is no way I can be an expert on everything, so I need a great team. We have been fortunate in attracting very talented people over the years and retaining their services.

AH: I've heard it said many times by CEOs of aircraft management companies, that for their clients they are often the first person the client calls if something goes wrong.

AP: Our clients are high net worth individuals, so they naturally want to speak to the top people in the company. And yes, you do get the 3:00 am call when something has gone wrong. Those are maybe not the greatest calls to get, but you get plenty of other calls from clients that give you pride and satisfaction. That all helps to keep me grounded.

Nobody is happy when an aircraft goes AoG, but eight out of ten times, when the situation has been resolved, the owner will express a level of appreciation for how things were dealt with. Owners are very demanding, and that is to be expected. But they are also generally realists. So, when you help them resolve issues, that further strengthens the relationship. If someone is absolutely unrealistic, that is probably not a relationship you would want to pursue anyway! Life is too short.

AH: What are your thoughts for the future? How big do you want to be?

AP: I think the best answer to that is, we have an appetite for growth, certainly, but we never want to outgrow who we are. We treasure the relationships we build up with the owners and with our employees, and we would not want to lose that feel of being a family business. We want to maintain the size of fleet that we can continue to relate to, and where we can continue to deliver on the owners' expectations.

I want to know each and every owner and every pilot, and how their kids are doing. I can't do all that on my own. I need my senior managers to be working constantly to make that culture work, and to inculcate it throughout their departments. Without a team who can perform like this, Priester would not be what it is today.

AH: Is the demand for aircraft management services across the board, or are you focusing on specific models?

AP: In the Part 91 area, where our strongest growth is, we see every aircraft type, from PC-12s to G650s, and everything in between.

"We have an appetite for growth, certainly, but we never want to outgrow who we are."

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AH: How essential is charter and charter sales to running a successful aircraft management operation?

AP: One of the challenges of our industry is that as an industry we do not price things the way they should be priced. There are not the margins, in charter services, to support long term innovation and R&D. If you look at a rate card for a GIV from the early 2000s, charter was priced at around $5,500 per hour. Today, getting on for 20 years later, it is still around the same figure, despite the fact that all the related costs have skyrocketed. We're good at repackaging charter to include more flexibility, but we are still basically doing the same thing for the same price.

The key for us is that we manage more airplanes on a Part 91 basis today, than we do on a Part 135. We're exploring a couple of new products that might make economic sense for owners.

The challenge that an owner faces is that with every day that goes by, the complexities of managing an aircraft increases. Training becomes more complex, the oversight of maintenance becomes more onerous, and there are more and more regulatory issues to deal with. It's hard for owners to keep up with limited resources so, it may make sense for them to put the management of the aircraft in our hands and leverage our infrastructure, quite apart from any thoughts of defraying their costs with some charter. |BAM

"We're good at repackaging charter to include more flexibility, but we are still basically doing the same thing for the same price."

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FARNBOROUGH AIRPORT

In October 2017, Gogo launched the AVANCE L5 inflight Wi-Fi system, which has become one of the most successful systems in Gogo's history with nearly 900 installed and flying today. Gogo followed with the launch of AVANCE L3 in January 2018 and sales for that system have been strong as well. Gogo also offers the AVANCE Smart Cabin System (SCS) which is a highly integrated cabin management and inflight entertainment solution.

What many may have missed with each of those systems is the underlying AVANCE platform that is the digital engine that drives and enables virtually everything Gogo produces today.

Gogo is reintroducing AVANCE to the business aviation market to help the industry gain a better understanding of the full capabilities AVANCE delivers and what it will mean in the future.

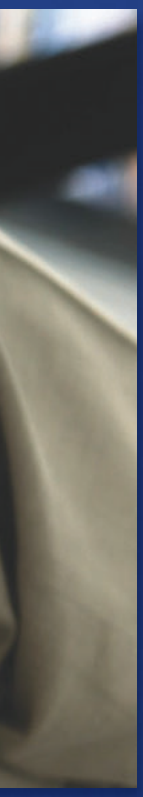
To learn more, Anthony Harrington spoke with Gogo's vice president of OEM account management, Mark Sander. Sander has been a member of Gogo's sales team for more than 15 years and has played an integral role in helping Gogo's ATG technology evolve from its earliest days when it launched the network.

AH: Let's begin by taking a closer look at what Gogo AVANCE is, and can you discuss how it differs from other inflight connectivity and entertainment systems?

MS: Gogo AVANCE isn't a specific product—it's a platform consisting of hardware and software solutions addressing five fundamental areas of aircraft connectivity: productivity, efficiency, confidence, control, and performance. Within those five areas, you'll find Gogo's hardware platforms, like the AVANCE L3 and L5, plus our emerging 5G system, along with software solutions such as Gogo Vision, Gogo Text & Talk, Smart Cabin Systems, and more. AVANCE is inflight connectivity's smartest platform and is the most personal way to enable passengers, crew and operators to stay connected during a flight. It also delivers additional features for pre- and post-flight monitoring and analysis. The bottom line here is that AVANCE is the engine that powers your entire Gogo experience.

AH: What can you tell us about the confidence and control aspects of the AVANCE platform?

MS: Just as inflight connectivity is so important for the VIPs in the back of the aircraft, connecting the aircraft LRU (line replaceable unit) with our support network is important to the operator and its director of maintenance (DOM). The AVANCE platform allows us to perform predictive maintenance on the equipment onboard the aircraft so we can diagnose and



EARTH CALLING...

Gogo's Vice President of OEM Account Management, Mark Sander, on Gogo's AVANCE platform

"AVANCE is inflight connectivity's smartest platform and is the most personal way to enable passengers, crew and operators to stay connected during a flight."

troubleshoot problems before they become "bigger" problems. This again, gives operators greater confidence. Often, we can see and fix problems before the customer sees them.

And then there's the element of control, which is really about putting these tools in the hands of the operator to ensure that the system is working properly. Operators and DOMs can review data from each flight via the DASH tool set and determine the overall system health on an ongoing basis. Current applications within DASH provide the ability for DOMs to know that the system is functioning as expected, while future applications will provide the ability to manage the inflight experience, including prioritizing certain user groups on the aircraft to optimize data usage and performance. Connectivity has become so vital that some customers simply won't fly if their Wi-Fi isn't working and customized to their needs.

AH: What are the main differences between AVANCE L5 and L3?

MS: This question is at the heart of the performance aspect of AVANCE. The AVANCE platform connects to a variety of current and future networks. Since 2009, Gogo has operated our air-to-ground (ATG) 3G network, which was enabled initially using the ATG 4000 or 5000 systems. AVANCE L3 is the next migration of products within the 3G network environment and it works really well for medium-sized jets and down. AVANCE L3 also contains all of the built-in features of Gogo Vision along with our productivity tools, namely Gogo DASH.

AVANCE L5 delivers superior performance and operates on our 4G network, which uses a lot of the same back-office infrastructure but with some innovative hardware, antenna, and network technology that combine to provide an increase in speed and performance. Gogo's 4G network delivers speeds that are about three times faster than our 3G network delivers. For aircraft with higher passenger loads or longer missions, AVANCE L5 provides a lot more capacity, including the ability to stream internet content. AVANCE L5 customers want the best in performance from an ATG system and L5 has been received very well in the market.

AH: You've talked about the 3G and 4G capability, but we know that Gogo is building a 5G network. What role does AVANCE play relative to Gogo 5G?

MS: I mentioned how we're designing these products with common software and hardware characteristics to minimize disruption in the aircraft. Gogo 5G will be an add-on to the AVANCE L5 platform. All of our AVANCE L5 customers are already partly provisioned to accept 5G when it comes into the market in 2021.

One of the distinct advantages of Gogo 5G is that—for the first time ever—we'll be incorporating both licensed and unlicensed frequencies simultaneously on the aircraft. That's critical because when we combine the two frequencies they will work together, and the result will be a significant increase in performance and unmatched redundancy. Only Gogo can deliver that benefit to an aircraft. With Gogo 5G, we're talking about performing 10 times or more faster than traditional 3G networks while adding a lot more capacity to the aircraft in terms of data throughput, providing blazing fast speeds to more passengers, using more devices on board, gobbling up a bunch of bandwidth. The 5G network and AVANCE system onboard will have the capacity to handle it.

AH: How does efficiency factor into the AVANCE platform?

MS: AVANCE brings efficiency in several ways. One of the most obvious we have seen through our analysis, is unlocking the potential of applications used by pilots and crew. Over time, we have learned what the crew is using our services for and that allows us to innovate further and enhance their experiences. By understanding what the crew is doing, we have partnered with a number of third-party companies that specialize in pilot applications and services. As we see trends in pilot applications evolve, AVANCE can evolve with them, enhancing the efficiency of the tools carried onboard and enrichening the interaction with those tools.

The AVANCE platform elements are all designed around commonality of hardware and software so our customers can progress from 3G to 4G and eventually to 5G functionality with as little disruption to the aircraft as possible. In the past, changing technology meant ripping equipment out of the airplane and then installing something brand new, which is very disruptive and expensive for the operator. Today, our hardware and software platforms have elements that allow us to keep some of that infrastructure intact but still efficiently deliver the benefits of new technology to our customers.

AH: What is Gogo Vision and how does it impact the customer?

MS: Gogo Vision fits within our productivity focus, providing entertainment and information ranging from inflight movies and e-magazines to a moving map, weather data, and up-to-the-minute news clips. We know that when people have completed their work, they may want to take care of some personal business, connect with family or enjoy some downtime watching a movie or reading an e-magazine. Our goal has always been to do more than just connect people with their email and the internet. We wanted to bring a set of feature-rich information and entertainment options to the aircraft because people want to stay connected, informed and entertained.

Many people don't know this, but Gogo Vision is the only fully integrated streaming inflight entertainment service in business aviation, and we offer exclusive licensed content including the latest Hollywood releases and TV programming. With Gogo Vision, operators and customers enjoy inflight entertainment without consuming massive amounts of data over the live link, which can be cost-prohibitive, especially on certain satellite links. We automatically upload content on the AVANCE platform to the aircraft, and we keep that content fresh with updates to movies, episodic television, and live newsfeeds. When customers watch Gogo Vision from their personal devices, they're seeing the latest content.

Another example of how we have seen trends change is the adoption of Gogo Vision's e-magazine service. By unlocking the benefits of e-magazines, passengers no longer have to "share the paper," and the aircraft no longer has to carry the extra weight. Even though we have had e-magazines available for more than a year, we are just now seeing the popularity of the service take off.

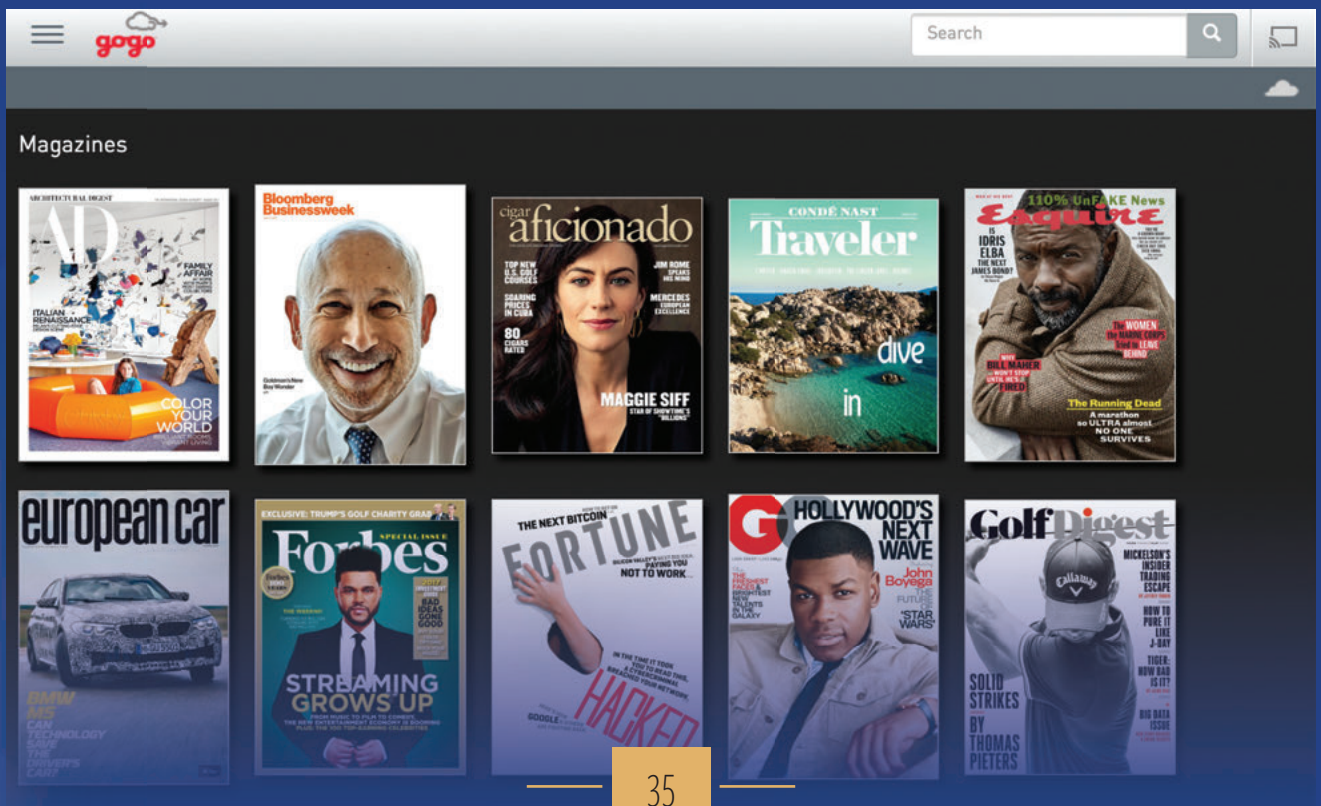
AH: How does that make Gogo Vision different from other IFEs?

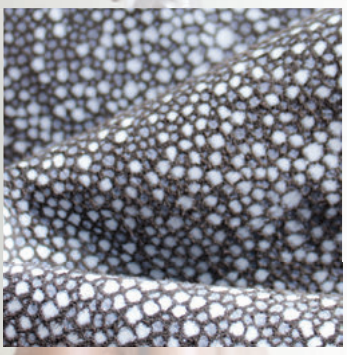
MS: If a customer is paying for a subscription-based service, we don't want to make them have to update their onboard content. That's a burden we want to take from them. We manage the licensed content and the ongoing updates on behalf of our customers. As a result, individual operators don't have to worry about keeping the content fresh. If they had to do that, they might have to download the content onto a drive, walk out to the airplane, then upload it to the server or a hard drive on the aircraft. Through Gogo Vision, all of that is handled wirelessly via our Gogo Cloud network. Whenever that aircraft lands and is within range of a Gogo Cloud Wi-Fi transmitter, either in its own hanger or at one of our FBO partners, content onboard is updated automatically. That's an important distinction that only Gogo can offer today.

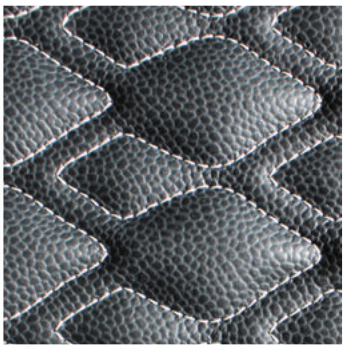
AH: How does AVANCE address security issues between users?

MS: As both a network operator and an equipment designer, we think about security from start to finish. At Gogo, security is built-in, not bolted on after the fact. Gogo manufactures the hardware and provides the service, plus we own and operate the ATG network. This gives us a tremendous advantage in terms of building security throughout the entire chain of our networks and onboard systems. We build security into our products that works in conjunction with the security that is built into our network.

We're securing the aircraft side. We're securing the RF link from the aircraft to the towers. We're securing the link from the towers to the Gogo data center. And we're securing via firewalls from our data center to the internet. With Gogo, that connection is secure throughout our entire ecosystem, and no other inflight connectivity provider can say that. BAM







NATURAL PERFECTION

Jared Eckler, CEO of Townsend Leather, on the company's 50 year journey

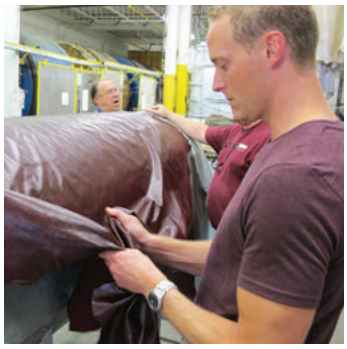
AH: Jared, your firm has been in business for decades now. How did you get started in business aviation?

JE: Our company is fifty years old. Originally, we were a contract finisher to the garment and shoe making sectors. This was for the first fifteen or twenty years of the business. However, by the late 1980s, we were starting to produce and market our own materials, selling directly to a range of customers. These included firms in the hospitality, shoe, and furniture sectors. Pretty much any industry that uses upholstery leather.

AH: Producing top quality leather for business aviation is highly demanding. What are the main challenges?

JE: We always strive to deliver perfect quality. Leather is a natural product so there are a lot of variables you have to deal with, including colour, thickness and the precise feel. Customers tend to take a sample very literally and will expect everything you deliver to them to be absolutely identical. Of course, since you are dealing with a natural product, each hide will be slightly different but you want to get the grain, the texture and the feel to seem to be as close to identical as possible.

We use only South German bull hides. These are the biggest hides in the world. They are rectangular in shape and pretty uniform in terms of shape, width, and



Townsend Partners
celebrating 50th Anniversary

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length, with each hide being approximately 60 square feet on average, and about 80 to 100 inches long.

We do all kinds of texturing of the leather and we can achieve any look or feel that the client might want. In addition to the bull hides we specialise in, we also offer a wide range of other materials, such as lamb skin or deer skin. Someone might, for example, want the look of ostrich hide on a big bull hide. We can make our bull hides look like anything the customer's interior designer wants.

AH: How demanding is it to get through the safety requirements that characterise business aviation?

JE: We have a lot of tests to pass. However, leather is not a particularly flammable substance. All our finishes are water-based and we are very responsible in terms of what we use.

AH: How has the whole COV-19 pandemic affected you?

JE: Our staff numbers were 160 at the beginning of the year. We currently have 100 staff and we are hoping to bring back the rest as normal business resumes. We have about 45 percent of the team working in the factory and 40 percent furloughed right now. The rest of the team are working from home.

AH: How do you see things developing from here?

AP: I see the return to previous levels being slow but steady. We have seen a lot of schedule changes out 3-6 months - aircraft deliveries could be 25-50 percent less the balance of 2020. We hope to see business and confidence rebound in 2021. We typically do see a 15 percent drop in the USA in a Presidential election year. The pandemic on top of a Presidential Election causes a lot of doubt and worry. Talk about the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic impacting the US in November is also on people's minds.

AH: Do you think NBAA will happen this year?

JE: A couple of people on my team are keen to go to NBAA if it happens. They are veterans of the industry and take great pride in always representing our company annually at NBAA. They were also committed to attend EBACE well after I questioned it could be held. We haven't made a decision on attending NBAA if it were open. At the time of this interview, I certainly can't imagine it being held.

AH: How close are you to resuming normal working?

JE: The good news is that we are up and running again, working no more than four to six hours a day. We have a team of people carrying out hygienic cleaning of the premises on a constant basis. We have four different buildings so the 40 to 45 percent of the team that are working are pretty spread out, observing the social distance rules, and wearing masks. We're doing a good job of keeping everyone safe and that is our primary concern. We initially opened just to make masks for our team and masks and gowns for local hospitals.

AH: How demanding is the market about having a constant stream of new designs and new looks to the base product?

JE: I think, visually, we are always trying to create new effects with texture and/or colour. We are always looking for ways of improving the quality of the product but you are right, the market always wants a new look and feel and new designs. You can never have enough different shades of key colours such as greys and blues. Each shade matters, and when you bring another 20 new shades to market, they all have an impact. So, we are constantly innovating.

We try to keep in mind that aviation designers want to be treated just like our designers for other applications and so we show them frequently things that may not traditionally be specified for aviation – pop colors, unique and dramatic embossings, hand-painted leathers. Quite often, if a designer is taken with something, they find a way to incorporate it in a special part of the aircraft.

AH: How did you personally get into this market, Jared?

JE: I joined the company 23 years ago as a summer job. I wasn't looking at it as a career, more a way to fund Summer partying until the Fall semester of college. I was going for Early Childhood at the time. However, I fell in love with the products and our people and I enjoyed my summer so much I stayed! I was already dating Sarah prior to joining. Terry said they needed help for the Summer and encouraged me to try. It was easy to find myself committed to Townsend and Sarah. We married 4 years later while her father took a lot of interest in mentoring me and pretty much schooled me in the business.

I led our production team for 5 years, working inside it the 5-7 previous. My specialty is in our raw material. I have personally selected hundreds of thousands of hides over the years. I source all our hides and cultivate very strong relationships with our German partners (one of my favorite places to go luckily).

Jared and Sarah Eckler

"It was easy to find myself committed to Townsend and Sarah. We married 4 years later while her father took a lot of interest in mentoring me and pretty much schooled me in the business."

I've been running the company for the last 10 years, following Terry's retirement. He's always there for me and is very supportive. He was an amazing teacher and mentor about leather, marketing, brands, quality, relationships, and created a wonderful foundation in a company that has a great culture and an outstanding reputation in the industry. He trusts me completely to take care of things and doesn't worry about the day to day anymore. Growing up with him and our business lets me keep perspective through periods like this. We have been through 9/11, and the recession of 2008. Both impacted us for years to follow. We have always taken the long view and I know we are going to come out of this time stronger, smarter, and even more resilient than before. |BAM

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MANAGING FROM STRENGTH

Jeff Lake, President of Duncan Aviation, talks to Anthony Harrington about his recent appointment and how the company is dealing with the pandemic

AH: Jeff, congratulations on your appointment as President of Duncan Aviation. Let's begin by looking at how Duncan Aviation has done through the upheaval and all the restrictions caused by COVID-19

JL: There is no doubt that this has been a very strange period, both for us and for the industry as a whole. I would say that we are doing very well so far. We have been able to keep all our locations open throughout the crisis.

Of course, we have had to change our strategies for 2020. We had all these great plans. Now our fundamental strategy and focus is to keep our customers, team members and their families all safe. Our second strategic aim is to concentrate on keeping our people working and staying profitable enough in order to keep operations going so we can serve our customers.

Duncan Aviation has always been in this for the long term, versus the short term, so for us, 2020 has simply become a year we need to get through in the best shape we can, whilst continuing to provide the highest standards of service to our clients.

"Duncan Aviation has always been in this for the long term, versus the short term, so for us, 2020 has simply become a year we need to get through in the best shape we can, whilst continuing to provide the highest standards of service to our clients."

Our senior management team has spent a lot of time on looking at our procedures to ensure social distancing, and on making sure our people are equipped with face masks and hand sanitizers. It's a big job because we have a lot of mobile response teams strategically located around the country. Some of these are in virus hot spots, so they have done very well to keep themselves and their families safe.

Right now, the country is kind of focusing on opening up again. However, here at Duncan Aviation, we have been open the whole time. Clearly, the virus is not going to simply go away, and we are factoring into our planning the fact that this could last until sometime into 2021.

AH: What is the biggest difference you see between the present economic downturn caused by governments the world over putting their countries into lockdown, and the Great Recession of 2008?

JL: The overwhelming difference that we see is that our hangars are full of maintenance jobs today, whereas in 2008 there was a very noticeable drop in client willingness to put jets into maintenance. Right through March and April, and on into May, the demand for maintenance work has stayed really strong.

Clearly, a lot of operators are taking the decision to book their aircraft into our maintenance centres early. The logic there is that since the jets are either experiencing low demand or are grounded by travel restrictions, now is a good time to get upcoming maintenance or upgrade projects out of the way.

Another difference is that during the Great Recession of 2008 we saw interior refurbishment work drop off a cliff. It just really went away. Today, the demand for interior work is down somewhat, but it has not stopped. Again, some operators and some owners are taking advantage of the fact that their aircraft are under-utilised or grounded, to get the job out the way. We are also seeing strong demand for paint jobs.

AH: How are you viewing the next 12 to 24 months, given your sense that there is not going to be an instant vaccine or cure for the virus anytime soon?

JL: I think there is a lot of optimism that at least the G8 countries will eventually see demand for private jet flying come back strong. This is not to say that the industry won't have its struggles, but we are pretty bullish. Unlike in 2008, this time round people are still keen on keeping their aircraft

Our sales groups are seeing new enquiries for pre-owned aircraft. The pre-purchase inspection work has gone down but at least people are actively looking again, and we see that picking up in the next three months.

AH: Jeff, let's look at your own career with Duncan Aviation. When did it all begin?

JL: I started back in 1993, as Financial Controller, in the finance and accounting area. I became the Chief Financial Officer in 1998 and assumed the role of Chief Operating Officer in 2008. My training and background is as a CPA, and my early career was

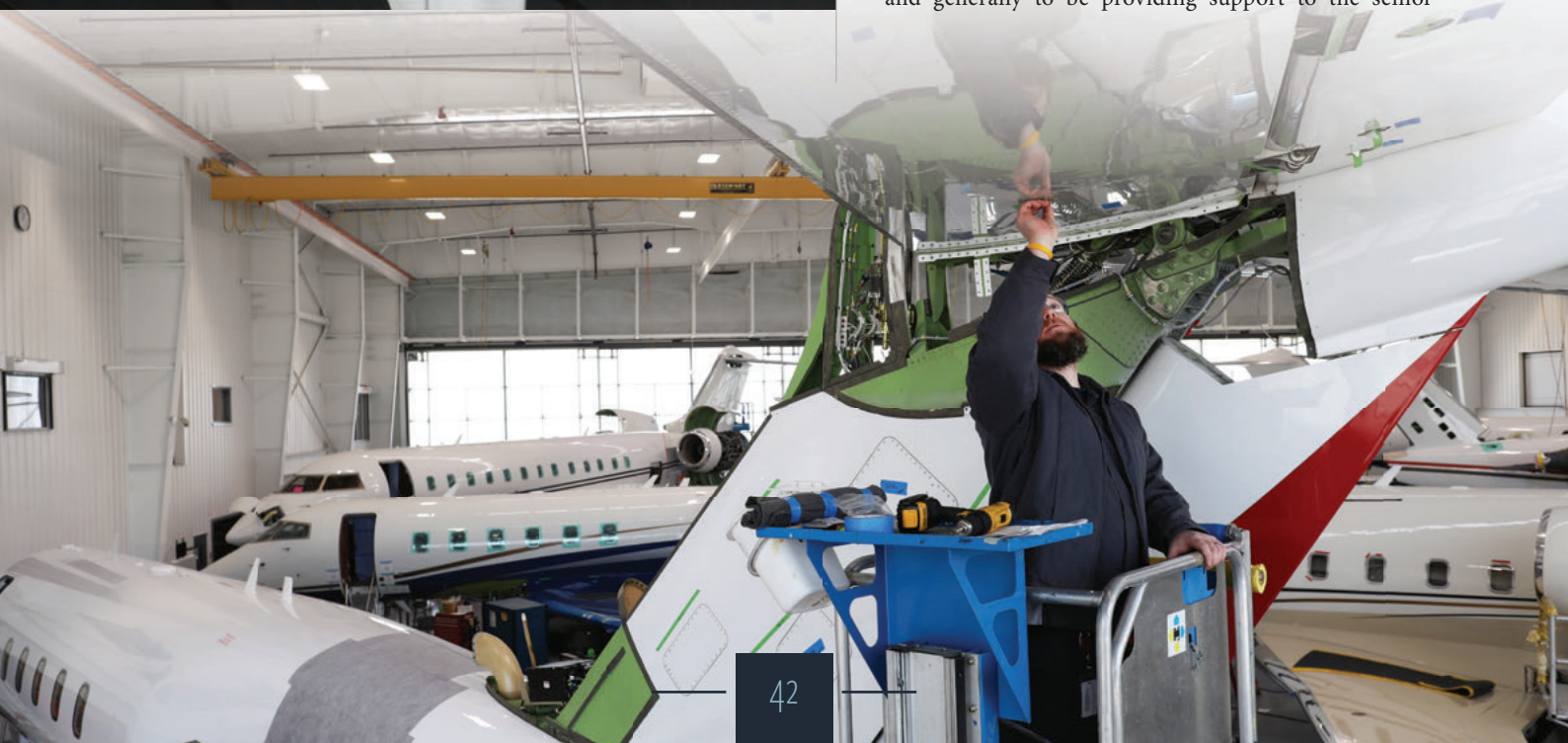
with International Paper. I've seen and worked in and around all the various departments in Duncan Aviation over time, so my overall understanding of the company is pretty extensive.

AH: How different is your present role, now that you have taken over as President from Aaron Hilkemann, who moved to the position of CEO and part-time Chairman of the Board of Advisors July 1st?

JL: It is definitely different from anything I've done before. However, we have a great senior leadership team here at Duncan Aviation. Aaron Hilkemann has built an amazing senior team and he leads the team with a strongly developed management style. He lets you manage your area of responsibility and actively encourages the senior team to work together cooperatively. He's great at delegating and letting everyone get involved, and that philosophy goes down through the team and through the company.

> "I've seen and worked in and around all the various departments in Duncan Aviation over time, so my overall understanding of the company is pretty extensive."
>
> Jeff Lake,
> President, Duncan Aviation

For my own part, the big changes will be that I will not be quite so involved in the day to day issues in particular departments. My role is now more of a leadership role, and generally to be providing support to the senior



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team. That is our style. Our senior leadership team is all about supporting the teams so they can be successful. What is so good about Duncan Aviation as a family-owned company, is that the family lets the senior team lead the company. Todd and Robert Duncan and Aaron have great leadership styles and I am really looking forward to following in their footsteps.

Duncan Aviation has been nearly 65 years in the making and we have built up a very solid reputation over that period. The company started in aircraft sales and did well. However, with the recession in the 1980s, aircraft sales declined significantly, but the company continued to do well. The guiding philosophy, then as now, was to take care of the customer like you yourself would want to be taken care of, and to build for the long term.

It was all about building lasting relationships, not about making a quick buck. That has been our style all along and it has created loyalty both among our customers and among the staff.

We have kept this going when we introduced the idea of having our satellite centres and when we established our rapid response teams. The idea is always to provide excellence both in services and in products.

We have more than two dozen avionics satellite locations at some of the busiest airports in the USA. We've managed to keep them going safely through the pandemic crisis, offering a wide range of avionics line and installation services.

AH: What kind of a recovery from the pandemic and the global lockdowns are you expecting?

JL: We see it as a slow grind back up. We certainly do not expect a big rebound, with people suddenly jumping on aircraft and flying around the globe. Even though the COVID statistics are improving in a lot of places, we are concerned where lockdowns have been lifted, and people gather together, COVID cases could worsen. Until a vaccine is developed and mass-produced, we do not believe there will be a sudden surge in international travel.

However, we do see people opening up somewhat. Businesses will need to travel, but it is going to be a U-shaped recovery, not a V-shaped one, in my opinion. We feel good about the future of general aviation in the long term, but we are telling our team members to expect challenges to last well into 2021. BAM

"Our senior leadership team is all about supporting the teams so they can be successful."

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ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Jim Rankin, CEO, West Star Aviation, on managing through the pandemic

Q: The last three months have obviously been incredibly tough ones for the industry. How has it been for West Star Aviation?

JR: We are classified as an essential business, as a specialist MRO provider, so we have been open for business throughout the crisis. The USA went into shutdown in the middle of March, but we have been busy throughout the period.

Above all, we have been very fortunate with our staff. We have 1500 employees and only two of them have tested positive for COVID-19 throughout the period, and they are both doing well now, and we had no transmission of the illness among their colleagues.

We took a very aggressive line, from the outset, well before the US shut down, as far as protecting our staff was concerned. Even before the State and Federal mandates were issued on protection, we took steps to isolate our teams. Most of our facilities are large, with big hangars. We ensured that all the hangar doors were shut so there was no intermixing of employees from one hangar to another.

We had hand sanitisers and/or wash hand basins at every door. We also had temperature checks on everyone coming into the facility. Plus we implemented the wearing of face masks every early on. The other thing we did was to divide our workforce into work teams of three or four technicians per team. You only worked with your teammates and there was no intermixing of teams. So if you needed help on a job, you only used the other folks from your team.

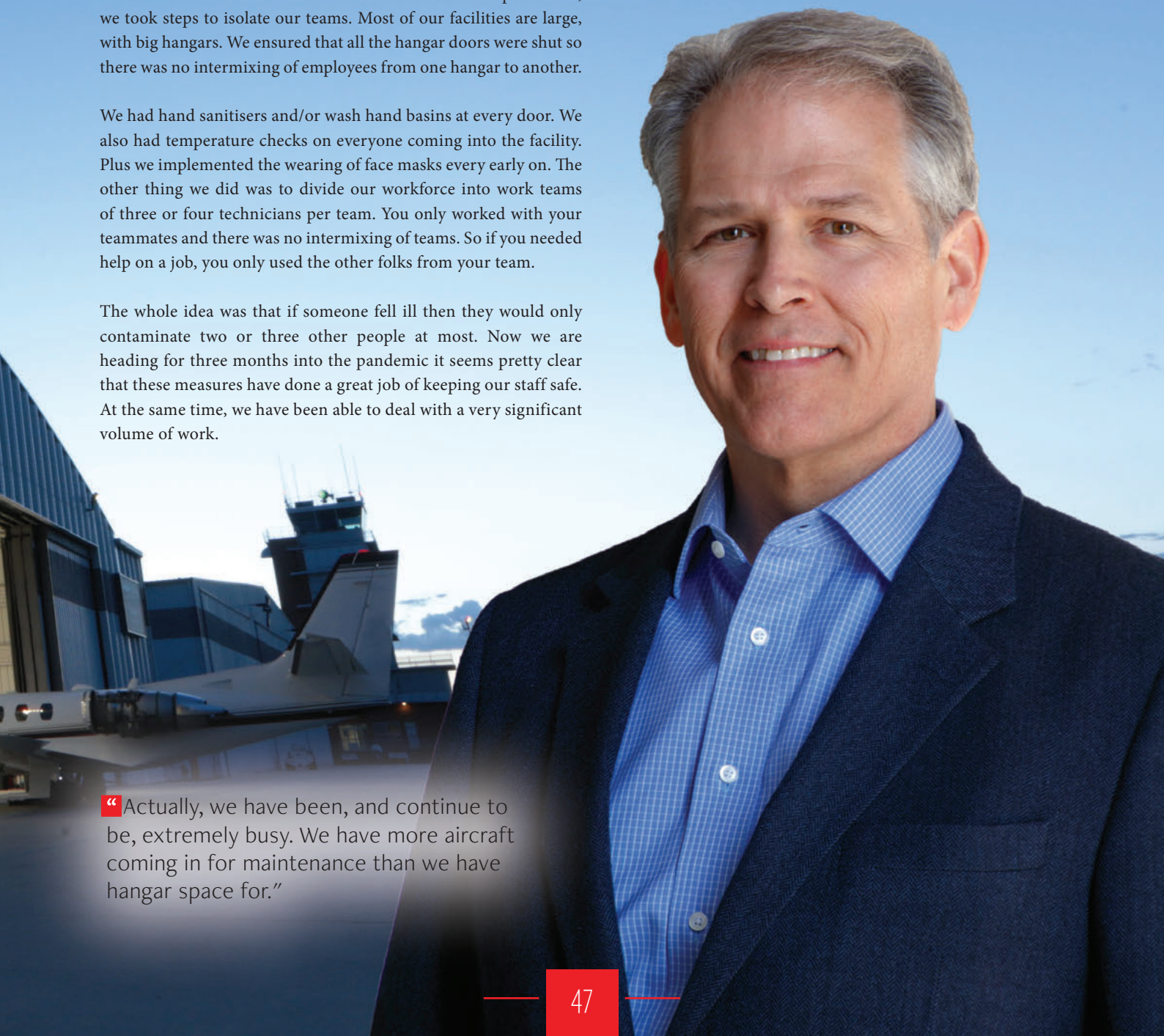
The whole idea was that if someone fell ill then they would only contaminate two or three other people at most. Now we are heading for three months into the pandemic it seems pretty clear that these measures have done a great job of keeping our staff safe. At the same time, we have been able to deal with a very significant volume of work.

Q: Have you seen a falling off in maintenance demand?

JR: Actually, we have been, and continue to be, extremely busy. We have more aircraft coming in for maintenance than we have hangar space for. Our aim, all along, has been to ensure that we are there for our customers and that we keep our employees safe and healthy.

Q: Have you seen evidence of operators and owners taking advantage of the lull in flying to bring scheduled maintenance work forward?

JR: We have seen quite a bit of that, with people bringing work forward that was scheduled to come in around the third or fourth quarter of the year. We have also seen folks deciding that they are not going to want to fly commercial anymore and becoming buyers. So, pre-purchase inspections and upgrades are another source of work.



"Actually, we have been, and continue to be, extremely busy. We have more aircraft coming in for maintenance than we have hangar space for."

Q: Do you think that there could be a falling off in business as we go through the year, because of the maintenance work that has been brought forward?

JR: If there is a falling off in demand, I don't believe that will be the cause. It could happen if we get a big spike in the pandemic again. That would be an issue. But business is fairly strong for us right now and given the downturn in the wider economy, we feel pretty fortunate about that.

If the economy opens up then I think there will be a lot of optimism that we're putting this behind us. If I think back to the last time we saw anything like the present downturn in the general economy, which would be the global financial crash of 2008, we saw business aviation taking a battering. It was seen as a luxury. Today, business aviation is seen far more as a necessity. With the economy opening up, business folks have to fly to do deals and make sales. A lot of them are not going to want to risk flying commercial, so that has to be a strong driver for business aviation.

Owners of aircraft know how productive they can be, using their aircraft, and they will want the industry to rebound as quickly as possible. Right now, flying hours are picking up again and that bodes well. I think we will see a stronger recovery than we saw after the 2008 crash. Then, it took the better part of four to five years for things to pick up. I think we'll do a fair bit better than that this time around.

Q: Do you think NBAA-BACE will happen this year?

JR: I sure hope it happens. This is one of the biggest events for us and we will definitely participate, provided they have the right precautions in place. I have a lot of confidence in the NBAA folks. If they elect to hold the event, I am sure they will have the proper safety measures and protocols in place.

Q: What are you hearing from your customer base about how they are coping through the pandemic?

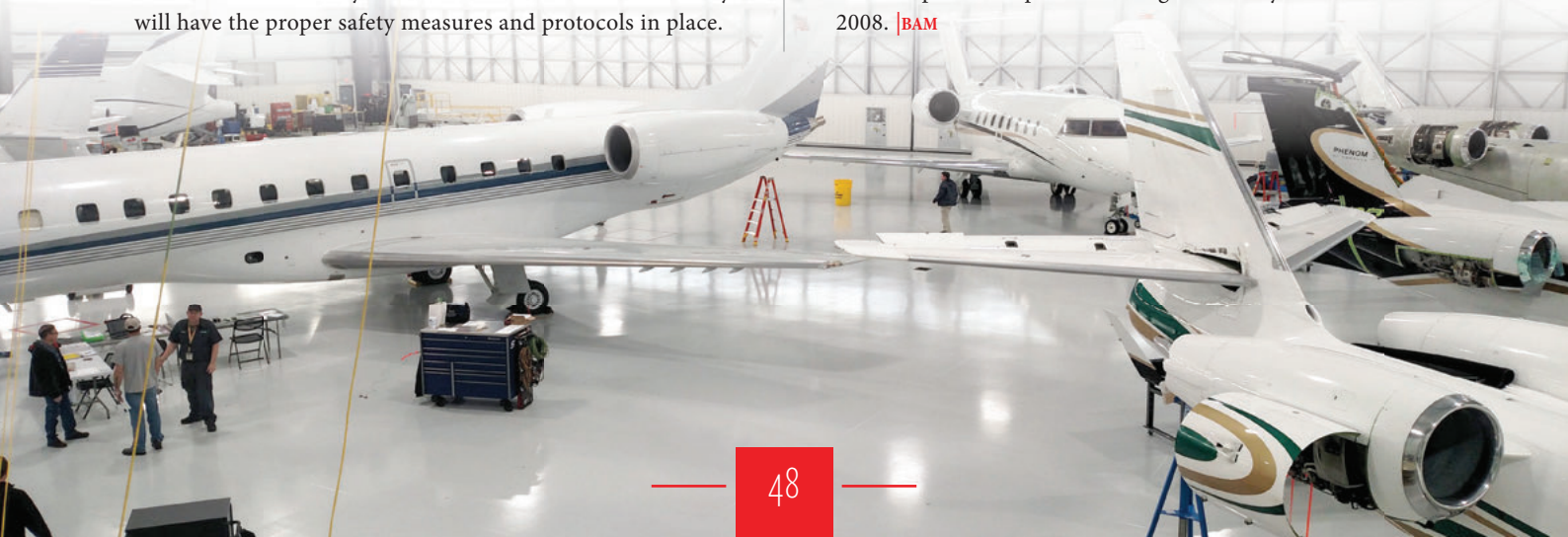
JR: We have a number of different types of customers ranging from corporate flight departments to individual owners, management companies, and brokers that buy and sell aircraft. They are all different. The operators, flight departments, and aircraft management companies have all seen around an 80 to 90 percent reduction in flight activity. Now, from what we hear, that is starting to pick up again, but some operations are still only at around 50 to 60 percent of normal activity.

The brokers, however, are seeing some favourable signs. In particular, valuations have not dropped the way they did back in 2008 and 2009. Prices are staying firmer and there is more activity, with new enquiries, and some deals closing.

> "Right now, flying hours are picking up again and that bodes well. I think we will see a stronger recovery than we saw after the 2008 crash."

We've been tracking customers for two and a half months now, and the level of optimism out there has definitely been increasing over the last three to four weeks.

I think the industry as a whole will be okay coming out of this. I expect a steeper and stronger recovery than we saw in 2008. |BAM



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ALL ABOUT BALANCE

Peter Landquist, VP Sales and Marketing at CTT Systems, on the importance of getting the humidity versus condensation balance right in aircraft

AH: Peter, you are in a very niche part of the market, providing humidifiers and dehumidifiers to both the commercial markets and the VIP space. How did the company get started in the aviation space?

PL: The company began in 1993 with the three engineers: Christer, Tom, and Thomas, whose initials form the company's name. There was a problem with a small airliner which had some corrosion caused by condensation. They used a ground-based dehumidifier to clear up the condensation, but the problem quickly returned when the aircraft went back into service.

The condensation problem arises because when the aircraft is full of passengers, as they breathe out the humidity in the cabin rises. When the warm, humid air works its way to the inner metal skin of the aircraft, which is probably experiencing temperatures of minus 52 Centigrade on the outer skin, the water vapour condenses out as frost on the inner skin.

When the aircraft is back on the ground, that frosting on the inner surface melts and the puddles of water accumulate and cause erosion and damage. Water is also heavy, as anyone who has lifted a bucket of water will know. So, the additional weight that accumulates will have a negative impact on the aircraft's range and its fuel burn.

Paradoxically, you have exactly the opposite problem in a business jet and in the First/Business-Class section of an airliner. There, where you have very few passengers, the air gets progressively dryer through the course of the flight. By the mid-point in the flight, the air in the cabin can be as dry as you would find in the desert.

There are plenty of medical studies which show that being exposed to dry air adds significantly to a passenger's sense of discomfort during the flight. It also has a negative impact on your health. The mucous membranes in the nose and chest are a good defense against cold germs and other viruses. When these membranes dry out, there is nothing to prevent the virus from gaining a grip on the body, which is probably why so many people catch a cold either on the flight or when they walk through the airport after a

Humidifiers

In a business jet and in the First/Business-Class section of an airliner you have very few passengers and the air gets progressively dryer through the course of the flight

flight. It takes time for the mucous membranes to get rehydrated and an individual remains vulnerable for some time after a flight.

We see an increased interest from the airlines to select humidifiers for the First and Business Class cabin due to dry environment. When actively humidifying First and Business Class, the Economy Class will also enjoy a humidity increase due to the aircraft re-circulation system.

This realisation has resulted in very good business for CTT from the commercial airline sector. We supply a balanced solution to them of humidifiers and dehumidifiers, to create the right conditions in the cabin while preventing the problems associated with condensation and corrosion on the inner skin of the fuselage.

By the end of the 1990s, a lot of VIP completions houses dealing with BBJs and ACJs asked if CTT could design balanced solutions for them to present to their high net worth and Head of State customers.

AH: So, the point is that in an airliner, or a converted airliner in the case of a BBJ or an ACJ, the multiple zones in the cabin each pose a separate problem when it comes to dry versus moist air?

PL: Exactly so. An aircraft cabin is divided into zones, and the fewer the passengers in a particular zone, the less humidity you will find there. In the First-Class zone, which may have only six to eight passengers, the humidity level rapidly drops to about 5 percent. Again, that means that the people who are paying the most, experience the worst humidity conditions unless you take steps to balance the humidity level.

The problem is even more exacerbated in a business jet, where it might just be the principal, or the principal and one other, that is in the cabin for the duration of a long flight. The air there will become desert-like over the course of the journey.

AH: Was certification a challenge?

PL: I wouldn't say that it was easy to get our products certified, but at the same time, it wasn't that difficult either. You have to meet all the requirements and the tests. The humidifier was probably the trickiest, since the evaporation pads have to be able to withstand the vibration tests required by EASA and the FAA. But we were able to show that the equipment could perform to the test standards, so in the end, we did not have any particular issues.

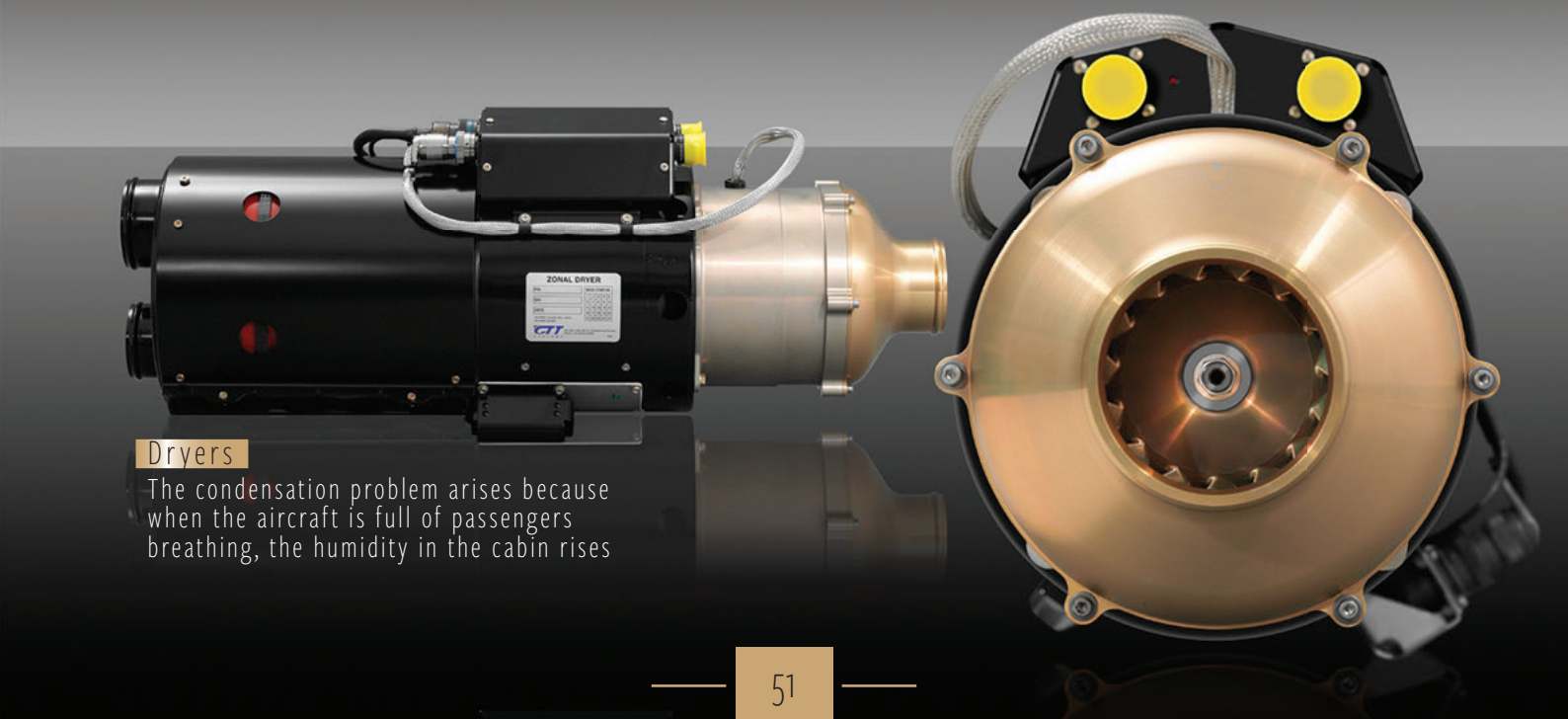
We are now certified for almost every airliner in use in commercial aviation and in BBJs and ACJs. We are delivering equipment for line-fitting for Boeing 787, 777-9, Airbus A380s and A350s. Plus we also now have a programme with Airbus for the AC321 series. We are working on our first business jet programmes as well.

AH: What about business aviation jet models?

PL: Our systems have been a little difficult to get into business aircraft because of their size. However, with the latest large cabin models they are now able to take our systems. We are in talks with the OEMs. It will be a great enhancement of the comfort levels experienced by business jet passengers on long flights.

AH: What has your feedback been like from the commercial space?

PL: We have had an excellent response from cabin crews and pilots to the fitting up of humidifiers in the crew rest area. China Southern was the first airliner that we kitted out, and they received their first Airbus 350 in June 2019. We have a second aircraft fitted out now, but it is not flying due to the pandemic.



Dryers

The condensation problem arises because when the aircraft is full of passengers breathing, the humidity in the cabin rises

Peter Landquist,
VP Sales & Marketing
CTT Systems

We are getting a steady stream of requests for our humidifiers and de-humidifiers from completions centres when they are fitting out commercial jets that are being used as VVIP aircraft and as business jets. The feedback we have been getting from them is that their VVIP owners are very satisfied with the increase in comfort levels during a flight.

I don't get to meet many owners, but I meet their representatives at BBJ and ACJ conferences. They tell me that once their owners have experienced a flight with our systems in place, they don't like flying anywhere without them. They can really feel the difference. Flying without the humidifier you end up bone dry by the end of the flight.

AH: Can you see yourselves being able to shrink your technology so that it can fit inside a wider range of business jets?

PL: We are seriously looking into this. Part of our sales problem is that we are providing something that you cannot see. It is not like a new ultra-high definition TV screen. It is something that you form a view of, subjectively, over the course of a flight. If you fly with a humidifier operating, you will feel normal through the course of the flight. Then you have to realise that, hey, I feel much better than I normally do after a flight of this duration.

We feel very confident that the future is bright for us. We hope that this equipment will eventually become standard. |BAM

"I don't get to meet many owners, but I meet their representatives at BBJ and ACJ conferences. They tell me that once their owners have experienced a flight with our systems in place, they don't like flying anywhere without them. They can really feel the difference."

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PLANNING FOR THE UPTURN

Max Brown, President, Garrett Leather, on the company's successes and his expectations of life after COVID-19

AH: Max, can we go back to the start of Garrett Leather? How did your father get the company started?

MB: It all started when my father was working in the warehouse of a leather business back in the early 1980s. He worked there for a few years, then decided that he could do everything the company was doing and do it better. So, he set up a company working from the attic in our house.

"Garrett" is an older English word for attic, so that struck him as an appropriate name, and a lot better than using his own name, 'Brown', which would have created the name 'Brown Leather', which would have conveyed an entirely inappropriate image of our stock lines. Colour is hugely important in our business!

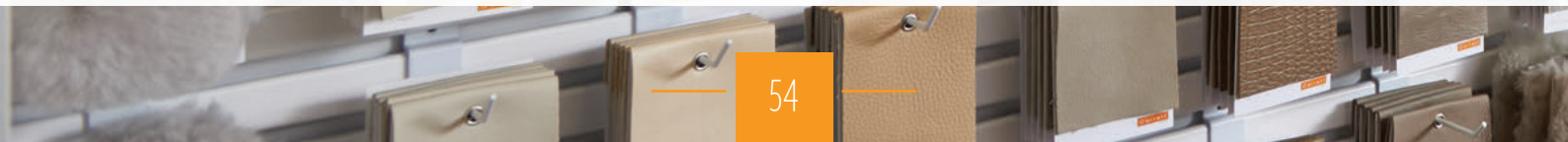
I was just two years old at the time. It was a huge gamble for him, since my mother was pregnant with my sister when he launched the business. However, he saw the opportunity and had the courage to go for it. It started with some of the aviation clients that he knew as his first customers. They valued a premium quality leather which my father was able to supply.

At that time, our supplies came from a tannery called Prime Tanning, in the State of Maine. Within a few years though, my father had established an excellent supplier relationship with a family-owned tannery in Northern Italy, which produces the best leather in the world. They have been an excellent supplier to us for the last 25 years. The switch of supplier was just as well, since Prime Tanning went through several bankruptcies, and just this May, went bust again.

That is sad to see, and it is a story that has been repeated time and again in small tanneries up and down the US. Small tanneries taking hides from local farmers have not been able to compete with the global players.

AH: Do you dye the hides in-house or does the supplier do that?

MB: We get the hides already dyed. We have a large bespoke division where we make samples for the big OEMs, with custom colours. One of the interesting facts about this business is that designers can never have enough colours. We have premium leather in over 700 different colours and shades, and still you will have a designer saying that they



want a pinker, or a bluer colour than anything we presently have in stock. So, we are always growing our colour options.

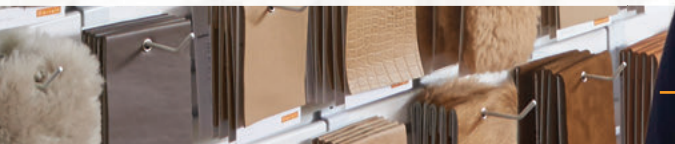
AH: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your business?

MB: The first thing to be said is that sales have been almost cut in half over the last few months. That has been hard to take. However, a lot of the factories around the world are now reopening. Once business aviation production lines start to ramp up again, we expect to see sales coming back strongly.

AH: How big is the company now and how have your staff coped through the lockdown?

MB: We have 60 employees now. We have been operating with about 25 percent of our workforce in the building at any one time, so we can observe social distancing. And our sales and client services teams are all working remotely from home.

We are fortunate in having a very large warehouse that is some 80,000 square feet in size. That has enabled us to separate our workstations quite a bit, to get the social distancing right.



AH: What do you think the exit from lockdown is going to look like for your operation?

MB: We're based in New York State, about an eight hour drive from New York City. Our county has around a million people in it and we're getting ready to exit from lockdown. We're already bringing a few more people back into the warehouse. They'll be wearing masks and are trained to observe social distancing.

As I said, as soon as March ended and April began, sales fell off a cliff and orders got really slow. A piece of good news though, is that Italy reopened from May 4th, so we have been able to free up materials for our customers that were ordered prior to the shutdown. We had goods stuck in transit as well, and all of that is freeing up.

AH: What are your expectations for the rest of the year?

MB: I think 2020 is already significantly damaged and I doubt that this damage will be made up by the end of the year. I expect a slow improvement. The hospitality side of our business has been very hard hit and it will be slow to come back. However, I do expect that business aviation will prove to be something of a bright spot for us through the remainder of this year.

We are pivoting towards the refurbishment market and building our portfolio of in-stock leathers. Being able to deliver a rapid response is key in the refurbishment market.

AH: Extending your stock means tying up more working capital, doesn't it?

MB: There's no option. If we can't complete an order in a very short timeframe, our competitors will get the business. So fast response times, along with having the best quality, is absolutely crucial. If we have to order specifically from our Italian supplier, it can take six to eight weeks for product to arrive in normal times.

That is fine where it is a major VIP wide-body jet being kitted out as part of an eighteen month to two-year project. But the refurbishment market runs on very tight time scales. Often the refurbishment is being done while the aircraft is grounded for maintenance work and there is a tight time window on the project.

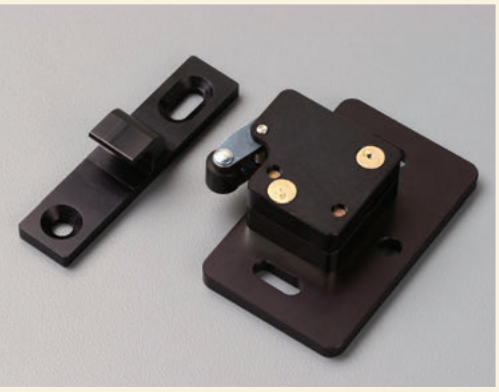
AH: How do you think both your business, and business aviation generally, will do, going forward?

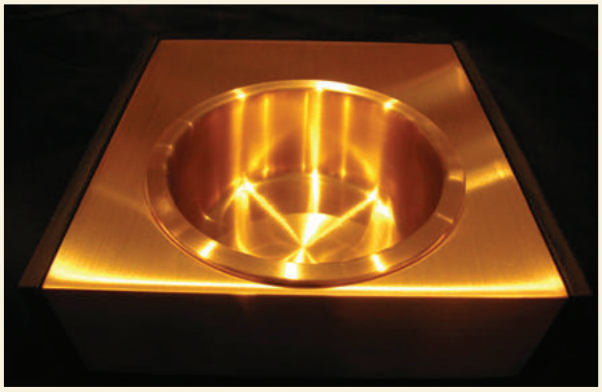
MB: One good thing is that we have not had to make major staff cuts. However, I noticed that Gulfstream just laid off 700 staff, so clearly there will be some significant issues going forward. Rolls Royce also just announced it is making 9,000 staff redundant.

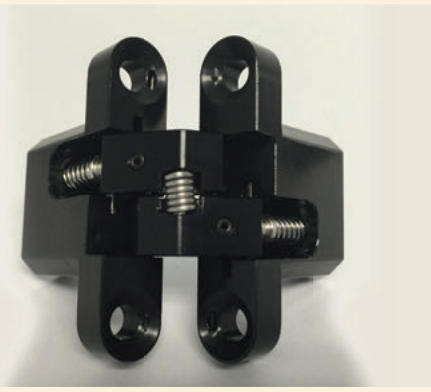
AH: I imagine it helps having multiple lines of business?

MB: Absolutely. We are in the commercial and workplace markets as well as business aviation and hospitality. Plus, we have a number of customers in the yacht design business, particularly in the Superyacht sector. And in the automotive market, we provide product to high net worth individuals who are classic car enthusiasts and who are restoring early models. We also provide leather to an OEM in the UK who makes Aston Martin and Minis.

I am confident that while we expect the recovery to be gradual, it will happen, and things will work their way back to a degree of normality. BAM







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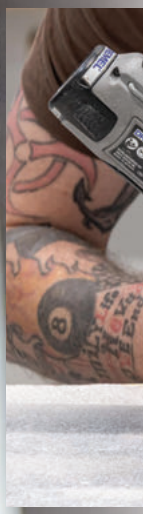

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GROWING THROUGH THE CRISIS

Arne Bruhn, CEO, F/LIST Germany, on the company's plans for growth

AH: Arne, how have things been with F/LIST through this pandemic?

AB: As you know, Germany has begun easing its way out of the lockdown. We are all either back at work or in the process of going back to work. My kids are now back at school, but only two days a week, on Wednesdays and Thursdays. I have to say, I enjoy working from home, so it has not been a hardship for me.

I think the government here handled things very well and it seems clear that we are moving slowly back to normal. I think the world will feel different, probably for a long time to come. However, it is already starting to feel more like normal for me. More people are available on the phone and I have really come to appreciate the merits of video conferencing over the lockdown. I expect to use it a lot more, going forward.

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The feedback from our employees also bears this out. They too have found that online conversations were very productive and useful. You listen better than you do on the phone, you can see reactions, and, of course, you don't have to waste time travelling to see a person.

AH: In the past, some employers have been reluctant to embrace home working. How did it work out for F/LIST?

AB: I trust my employees. I set up a meeting system for them to use so that they could talk to colleagues online. They seem happy working from home and the feedback I get is that the online conversations were good and useful.

However, there are clearly things in a company such as ours that you cannot do from home, including manufacturing and engineering. For my own part, it continued to be very important for me to be able to walk the shop floor. People need to see that senior management are alert and interested. I have been on the shop floor myself, earlier in my career and I know that people are always happier talking to senior management in their own environment rather than sitting in the manager's office. I have always felt that

things work best when everyone contributes, and you don't get the best contributions when it is employee to director, sitting across the desk from each other. People are much more comfortable in their usual ecosystem.

AH: Have you had to slim down staff numbers because of the pandemic?

AB: Actually, the reverse is true. We are actively growing our staff numbers but in a measured way. I am pleased to say that we haven't had to let anyone go over the lockdown. For us, the best way of managing growth, without leaving ourselves exposed to cyclical swings in the markets is to grow with partners. We are actively expanding our partnering relationships. You can't take on every aspect of this complex industry yourself so partnering is key. But we are also expanding our staff at the same time.

AH: How do you think the industry is doing through this? Do you see it coming out of what is a pretty devastating falling off of activity, in reasonable shape?

AB: In general, companies in general aviation know how to weather tough periods. I was in the commercial airline business for 20 years and as everyone knows, the airlines go through cycles of good and bad times. You need to be prepared for everything.

Right now, my former colleagues in commercial aviation are having a really hard time and I keep my fingers crossed that they will be able to emerge from this and start to see an upturn again.

AH: How has business been for F/LIST through the downturn?

AB: I would not say that it has been business as usual. We have had to adapt. We gave a lot of consideration to the question of what customers would see as a real value-added service through the period of the pandemic. As a result, we came up with an aircraft disinfection and sanitisation service to provide long-term protection to the cabin.

We developed this with our network in the US and came up with a special product, that lasts on surfaces for a year, which is much longer than most other products. This was an area where we showed great productivity, taking advantage of what were really adverse circumstances.

AH: In normal times, are you more involved with refurbishments, or with new completions?

AB: Whatever improves the cabin is an opportunity for us. If you take our disinfection service, that is yet another way of building relationships with the customer. The work can start with disinfecting the cabin and that can lead to a complete cabin upgrade.

We have certainly ramped up our cabin refurbishment business hugely. We have moved from manufacturing elements for the cabin to doing complete new aircraft outfitting, in close cooperation with our partners. With refurbishments, we see a tremendous after-market opportunity.

If someone is contemplating purchasing a pre-owned aircraft we can go way beyond just refurbishing the cabin. We can support the design of a completely new cabin which would make that aircraft look like a brand new model.

In this, we work closely with designers and we have a huge range of unique materials that we can bring. These include natural looking materials, like stone, wood and leather, as well as hi-tech finishes like carbon fibre optic.

AH: How do you look to win business in the after-market space?

AB: We have direct relationships with some owners, but we also have very good relationships with a number of MROs and completions houses. We are well known for our cabins across a wide range of aircraft models. Plus we stay in close contact with fleet operators and with brokers. Our mission is to be there for everyone and to add value for everyone. |BAM

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"We are actively growing our staff numbers but in a measured way. I am pleased to say that we haven't had to let anyone go over the lockdown."

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The Krimson Aviation Team showed its full capabilities as the crisis grew

AFRICA IN CRISIS

Dawit Lemma, CEO of Krimson Aviation, on how his company has supported aviation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

Q: I know Africa has faced its fair share of crises where aviation has helped recovery. What has been Krimson's experience during the pandemic?

DL: Historically African aviation has had to handle many humanitarian crises so Krimson is experienced working with medevac and cargo flights. Personally, I have never experienced the intensity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous crises have tended to exist in one country or region, but this pandemic has shone a spotlight on just how interconnected the world is. We've been supporting repatriation, medevac and cargo operations, particularly for PPE equipment, and have arranged flights to and from Asia as well as within Africa. Modifying our normal daily operations and leveraging our skillsets to support local and international governments and humanitarian organisations has been our primary focus.

Q: What does Krimson bring to supporting aviation during the crisis?

DL: Conducting business in Ethiopia, and across the continent in general, requires local knowledge and expertise. The Krimson team has this and is highly respected with a rich network of contacts and our medevac experience has contributed to framing medevac standard operating procedures in East Africa. Having been raised in Switzerland, educated in the US and worked in Europe, my background also brings an international outlook. This is a powerful combination for current circumstances when projects need completing with maximum efficiency.

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"I have certainly learned that having a well-trained, dedicated team is worth more than its weight in gold. Keeping them informed and the lines of communication open has streamlined our operations."

Dawit Lemma,
CEO and Founder,
Krimson Aviation

Q: What have been the main challenges for Krimson and operations in general?

DL: The fluidity of the situation has been a challenge for sure. Pre-pandemic we kept current with the varying regulations of numerous African nations, as well as internationally, but during the pandemic these were changing globally, on an hourly basis. Sourcing permits, arranging tech stops, and then managing crew expectations within the parameters of countries gradually locking down stretched us to our limits. Some countries made the process easier by enabling online permits, and we hope this may continue post the crisis. Others were less helpful.

The movement of money has also been a challenge. It is often difficult to transfer money to and from African banks, and the crisis has amplified this. Cash does not flow easily and with a multi-national customer base that is a lot of forex for our financial team to balance.

Q: What has been different to normal for Ethiopian aviation?

DL: Addis Ababa Bole International Airport was one of the last airports to implement flight restrictions. Ethiopian Airlines continued to fly to 30 destinations and Bole became a hub for repatriations, fuel stops, cargo, and diplomatic missions. The United Nations set up a response team there too. Business aviation activity has so far consisted of medevacs, fuel stops, and repatriation flights (charter passengers arriving or departing on an Ethiopian Airlines flight). So movements have continued but administration and practical logistics have become much more complicated. A good example of this was a repatriation flight we undertook in conjunction with several embassies. The charter flight arrived into Addis with some 110 ex-pats from nine different countries on board. They were destined for a dozen destinations across Europe, Asia, and North America. We had to ensure that each passenger

reached their flight out, along with their luggage and the right documentation. As each different destination was in varying stages of lockdown, the paperwork and logistical requirements were constantly evolving but we managed to get everybody home. It's pretty potent knowing that you're responsible for reuniting families in a time of confusion, and it is certainly a great motivator for success.

Q: Who has Krimson supported during this time and which aircraft have you worked with?

DL: Krimson regularly handles C-suite executives and heads-of-state, but through this time we have worked with a broad spectrum of organisations including embassies to support repatriation, and humanitarian groups to facilitate the transportation of equipment and staff both intra- and inter-continentally. In total, we've arranged transport for more than 100 tonnes of cargo, but most flights have been medevac related. These are not for COVID19 cases, but for patients in need of urgent medical care only available at specific centres of clinical excellence. With COVID19 dominating the media it is easy to forget that there are other medical needs. Charters have featured aircraft as small as Cessna Caravans and as large as a B787 Dreamliners. Ironically, while the commercial airline sector has taken a massive hit, the value of aviation of all types in this pandemic cannot be underestimated.

Q: What lessons have you learned so far and how will African business aviation be different as we move towards the new norm?

DL: I have certainly learned that having a well-trained, dedicated team is worth more than its weight in gold. Keeping them informed and the lines of communication open has streamlined our operations. The flexibility of business aviation to facilitate very specific missions has also been highlighted.

With the likely reduction of commercial routes business aviation will become even more essential for intra-continental African travel. I hope that the AfBAA organisation will take this opportunity to really promote the benefits of the sector to governments, regulators and the commercial sector. Once restrictions are lifted its value will be better understood as a means of transport that efficiently connects and drives economies.

It can only do this if the sector demonstrates the ability to safely and securely transport passengers and crew by mitigating all risk of infection. This needs to happen across the supply chain from ground transportation and accommodation through to FBOs and aircraft catering and hygiene. Passenger confidence will revolve around the perception of a healthy environment and as an industry aviation must focus on delivering this, whether it be for commercial or executive aircraft travel. |BAM

VIRTUAL REALITY

Brad Thress, recently appointed President and CEO of FlightSafety, talks to Anthony Harrington about his new role and the company's expectations for exiting the pandemic restrictions

On February 14th this year, FlightSafety announced that Brad Thress, formerly Senior Vice President, Global Parts, Program and Flight Operations, at Textron, and the President of Able Aerospace, was taking over from David Davenport as President and CEO.

AH: Brad, congratulations on your appointment. It must have been something of a wrench leaving Textron after 27 years, but you are now heading up one of the most exciting and technologically sophisticated companies in the industry. When you decided to move, you knew they were already a huge player in the market. What motivated you to take the leadership position and how does it feel now that you have?

BT: I suppose the first point to make is that I have been familiar with FlightSafety and their simulators and training for a very long time, probably 30 years or more, as a pilot. Plus, I had a very close working relationship with the company when Textron put together our joint training venture with FlightSafety, across a number of our models.

I knew too, that they were a very geographically dispersed company, with 80 physical locations and 37 learning centres around the world, and that was very interesting to me. Then there is the fact that simulation and pilot training comes under a lot of different regulatory regimes around the world.

However, there is no doubt that while it is a tough business, aviation training, in general, is a very good business to be in.

AH: Simulators are about creating a very realistic, immersive experience for pilots. However, this is also exactly what the computer and console gaming worlds are all about and we are seeing billions spent on creating virtual realities there. Do you see some crossover potential there for simulators?

BT: We certainly think gaming has a big part to play and we already have two products that address this. We have developed a virtual reality system that we think can translate across aviation training in general. It is a mixed reality system, with some physical components, such as a control stick, while the rest of the cockpit is simulated in 3D goggles.

With this system, the student can sit at the desktop and practice all sorts of things, up to and including flying in formation. All this happens in virtual reality, so VR and developments in VR are something we are both using and watching really closely. This is all part of the solution to accelerate pilot training.

Of course, right at this moment, with so many airlines grounding most of their fleet, the industry is not really feeling the acute shortage of trained pilots. However, as soon as things start normalizing, that problem will come back with a vengeance. So we need to be thinking of ways of expediting pilot training safely, as well as refreshing and enhancing the

skill sets of experienced pilots, and this is what our clients are looking for.

AH: What kind of a falling off in demand for training have you seen through the pandemic crisis?

BT: We have seen quite a drop, but on the other hand, we have taken an aggressive stance towards ensuring safety. We have very thorough and rigorous procedures for cleaning the simulators, and we have distributed over 100,000 masks and gloves to staff and clients. We have FAA approval for staff and trainees to not put oxygen masks on for emergency descents during recurrent training.

At the same time, we have tried to facilitate clients doing extended learning from home. We have received FAA certification for our online ground school training as well as our LiveLearning.

> "As a user, of course, I am up to speed with simulators, having been in them many times over the course of my career. But now I am learning more and more about the software packages and the capabilities of the motion systems that go to creating such a realistic experience for pilots."

Plus, we have an enterprise-wide scheduling system, which enables us to see what staff are available at our various locations at any one time. So we can map out the logistics of meeting customer demand across all our centres. There are a lot of constraints on the schedulers because all the courses and training are so specific to models and situations, so it is a very complex job. This system was deployed only a month ago and it is going to be a huge benefit to the whole organisation.

AH: How much of this is new ground for you Brad?

BT: Since I was responsible for flight operations in my previous position, along with all the experience I have in manufacturing and engineering, I can honestly say that scheduling and logistics is a key part

of my skill set and I believe I have something to bring to the table there.

As a user, of course, I am up to speed with simulators, having been in them many times over the course of my career. But now I am learning more and more about the software packages and the capabilities of the motion systems that go to creating such a realistic experience for pilots. I wouldn't say I was up to speed with it all yet, but I'm surely working on it all.

AH: It is early days, but what do you see as the big challenges going forward?

BT: There are literally dozens of new devices that we are either currently building or that have been proposed. At the same time, almost every day, it seems, there are new technology developments in simulation. On top of the technical dimension, there are the usual business challenges associated with growth, and with deciding what our footprint, as a company, is going to be over the next five to ten years.

This has opened up a very exciting chapter for me, rich in learning opportunities and I look forward to doing my part to keep FlightSafety at the forefront of training in our industry. |BAM

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SHINING THROUGH

Chris Moore, President of Business Aviation at Satcom Direct, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's innovations through the pandemic

AH: What have things been like for SD through the pandemic so far?

CM: Clearly, what we are living through right now is unprecedented in aviation as a whole. There have never been global travel restrictions on this scale, with over four billion people around the world living under lockdown, or 'shelter at home' restrictions.

Given the scale of the response to COVID-19, the damage to the global economy is huge and continuing, so we have to expect business aviation to take a hit. As a group, however, SD is fortunate in that we address multiple market segments. Our sister company SD Communications is in land mobile communications and partners with Iridium, and has military and government offerings. So that has helped us weather the storm.

Another thing that has played well for us is that we own our own teleports through COMSAT in Santa Paula CA. and Southbury, CT., which land satellite signals, so that is good too. In SD, we have also benefitted from the fact that we have a subscription-based revenue model and we do flight department software, plus hardware and routers. So, there are still things going on.

Despite all the restrictions, there has not been a complete stop in business aircraft flying. We have seen revenues from business aviation down by a significant margin, but a number of entrepreneurial business people have been using or donating their aircraft to assist in multiple ways with the pandemic.

AH: So, being multi-layered has played well for SD?

CM: It has been very strong for us. Obviously, revenue and profit expectations for the first half of 2020 are well down but having multiple lines of business is definitely helping us to survive the pandemic.

AH: What are you doing that is different right now to innovate your way through this?

CM: Amongst other things, such as online webinars, we have launched a number of training programmes for clients, so that while people are down they can improve their skills and become more informed on technical issues. We're looking at how we can make clients more efficient going forward and making sure that their operational costs are as efficient as they can be.

So, all in all, we have been using our time wisely, despite the fact that there are a lot less aircraft actually flying at present. We've also been working closely with a number of clients to share learnings and to help them get through the pandemic.

I have been very impressed, time and again,

Moore hopes NBAA will go ahead this year

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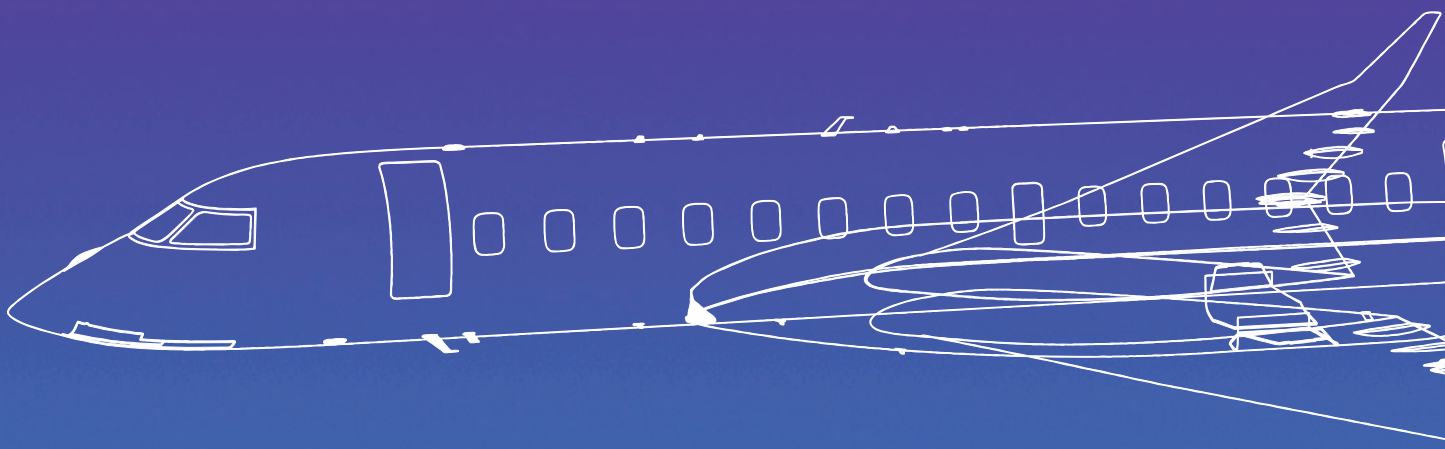

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by the fact that this industry responds extremely well to crises. When things get tough, the industry comes together as a community. People at all levels, in management and across the sector, genuinely try to help each other's businesses out so that as many as possible make it through the tough times. What I am seeing all the time as we go through this period, is a tremendous level of camaraderie in the industry, and that is extremely encouraging.

SD Webinar Series

AH: How have things been working out in your data centres?

CM: We have been reaping the benefit of the infrastructure that we have built out over the last 15 to 20 years. This has allowed our team to have the correct safety measures in place, with proper social distancing. Our network operations centre is running 24x7.

We have the infrastructure to enable many of our staff to work remotely from home, which keeps them and their families safe. Throughout this whole period, we have focused very strongly on making sure that our staff and customers come first.

AH: So you have been able to keep a lot of your operations running, while taking measures to protect the staff?

CM: Absolutely. The investment we're making in our data centre architecture and teleport architecture continues as normal. Satellite companies are customers of ours and have been using the teleport network throughout this period. We've pivoted our business to ensure that we have the right pandemic plans and procedures in place, so we can continue to provide the same level of service to customers, as well as assisting their businesses.

AH: Do you see NBAA happening?

CM: As we stand, in mid-May, I really hope so. If NBAA does go ahead it could be the busiest show we have yet seen. The cancellation of so many business aviation shows has really restricted the industry and people will want to take advantage of the opportunity to show everyone that they are very much open for business. However, it all depends on travel restrictions around the world being lifted. We are seeing some easing of that, but the timing will be tight.

If NBAA does get cancelled, that tells us all, globally, what the rest of 2020 will be like. It will be a year for the industry to get through as best it can. On the plus side, we are starting to see some borders opening up and some travel restrictions being lifted. But it is still very early days.

AH: How do you see the rest of the year playing out?

CM: It is going to be interesting and challenging, that's for sure. One good thing is that US flights by private jets are still going on. We have to wait and see what the 'new normal' is going to be as countries try to work their way out of lockdown. We are all watching the commercial airline industry, which has been devastated by the pandemic.

Are people going to be able to get on an airline and go from the US to the UK any time soon? Commercial airlines need a certain number of passenger hours to stay solvent. How are they going to generate passenger confidence as things open up again? What kinds of screening procedures will they put in place? Airlines are working hard to solve these problems so we shall see.

We all remember what travelling to Asia was like when the SARs epidemic was at its height, walking past the heat cameras as you went through the terminal at Hong Kong, for example.

What gives me confidence though is that we are very adaptable as an industry. While people fear the worst, as human beings we always seem to find a way of making sure that we get to where we want to go. This is not the first and it won't be the last turmoil that business aviation has gone through. BAM

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LUXURY FIRST

Karen Caputo, President and CEO, Tapis Corporation, on building one of the top interior fabrics companies in the industry

Q: Can we start with the history of Tapis. Where did the idea of specialising in fabrics for business jets come from?

KC: Tapis has been providing high performing aircraft interior fabrics since 1977. Tapis originally began in the VIP sector of aviation, making flame retardant custom carpets. The next offering we developed was our Ultrasuede for headliners in the private jet market. Later, the founder, Al Caputo, innovated one of the first AN61 heat release fabrics, which is now used by more than 50 carriers around the world.

Q: When did you start in the industry and how did things develop?

KC: I began working with my father, Al Caputo, in 1977 while completing a degree in business education. I became very interested in the aviation business and decided to put aside my initial plans to teach. That led to me jumping right in and helping to lead Tapis. In 1985 the company entered the commercial aviation sector, and by 1988 I began officially running Tapis operations.

As mentioned, we were the first in the industry to develop a heat release product able to meet the new (at the time) requirements for AN61 heat and smoke for vertical surfaces. Under my leadership, Tapis opened up an additional company based in Texas (BAKS) to expand the product offering and to become autonomous in flame treatment.

Q: It is great that Tapis is a woman-run company and was so at a time when women-owned operations were a tiny minority of the total US company base. What were the challenges?

KC: For many women in leadership roles, there were, of course, additional challenges we had to face that were not issues for our male colleagues. There were times where a client would request a male colleague to attend meetings in lieu of myself, simply on gender grounds. Oftentimes there was no recognition of the female role as leader of a company. However, I am pleased to be able to say that, overall, respect for a female as leader of a company has thankfully improved over the years.

Q: Do you think the challenges for a new start up are different in 2020, to what they were in 1977?

KC: The current challenges today tend to be standard across all sectors. You have to define yourself and your mission and build your brand. Our challenge today, as always is to find ways of elevating the passenger experience. That is key for us.

We are committed to quality and service. We are also committed to being innovative and anticipating the future needs of aviation with respect to soft interior furnishings. It is critical that all of the above is done while maintaining a healthy financial operation.

Q: What sorts of fabrics were in demand when Tapis started?

KC: In the Business Aviation sector, custom carpet and luxurious headliner fabrics were in high demand. In the

commercial aviation sector, there was a strong demand for developing a fabric which would meet the FAA requirements for vertical surfaces inside the commercial aircraft cabin.

Q: Where have things progressed to now? What is happening in terms of technological innovations and safety considerations?

KC: Tapis has evolved into an industry solutions provider for aircraft interiors. Our customers lean on our knowledge and many years of experience to produce new innovative materials for all applications in both the business jet market as well as in commercial aviation.

Most of our products are engineered materials, we have the ability to customize and incorporate different technologies like ink and stain protection, added UV Resins, and anti-microbial protection. We pride ourselves on having many different materials to choose from for all interior applications. In addition, we customize flame treatment in our own production facility and then test in our own FAA approved lab on our premises.

Q: What are the current 'favourite' ranges, most in demand?

KC: We're seeing continuous demand for innovative

performance textiles that offer the look of "fabric" while delivering the performance attributes of engineered leather. We've developed a number of new textures throughout the Ultrafabrics collection which do just that, including our Dwell, Linen, and Wired Collections to name a few. Ultraleather Pro, which includes enhanced ink and stain protection, has continued to be one of the leading soft goods in the market as operators continue to prioritize cabin maintenance.

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Tapis at AIX 2019
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There is also continued demand for new, sustainable fabrics. Our TapiSuede and Ultrasuede collections are both polyester microfiber fabrics utilizing plant-based polyester.

Q: Let's look a little at the current COV19 crisis. What has its impact been for Tapis, and what can you see of the way the industry at large is coping? How do you see us emerging from this?

KC: Covid-19 has challenged Tapis and the entire aircraft interiors industry in an unprecedented fashion. The negative consequences of air travel coming to a halt, along with the required shutdowns, have trickled down to all of us in the industry.

Fortunately, Tapis has been able to maintain operations, with many staff working remotely. Plus we have reduced and staggered staff in our manufacturing operations to protect the health and safety of our employees, while continuing to service our loyal customer base.

I believe our industry will emerge strongly from this pandemic. The recovery may be gradual, but I think new opportunities will arise for business aviation as corporations start to prioritize health, safety, and personal space when flying.

While the industry had undoubtedly been impacted, we have also seen the continuation of large-scale programs in development while staff work remotely. In addition, many companies have been taking this time to redo parts of their interiors while the aircraft was not in use. We are very fortunate to be a part of this industry and look forward to lighter days.

Q: Are your fabrics much in demand when pre-owned jets are getting refurbished interiors? Or is the bulk of your business in the new completions market?

KC: Our business is pretty balanced between the new completions market and the refurbishment market. Our fabrics are specified on the completion level with all the major OEMs, and these products perform extremely well over time. So when it comes time for an interior refresh, these products often stay specified as part of the refurbishment. We also carry an extensive inventory of color and textures within our product collection, giving a wide variety of options and that is key. Customers want choices.

Q: What are the relations like with the OEMs, do they buy from you for their own internal completions?

KC: Yes, we work with all of the major OEM's directly for their internal completions. Tapis prides itself on being a solution provider and in order to provide solutions it's important you understand the problems and challenges the OEMs and ultimately the operators face.

The designers at the OEM's are a driving force in our new product development. By working closely with them, we learn about the evolving demands inside the cabin and are able to develop new products to meet those demands.

Q: How do you see the market developing?

KC: As globalization continues, the demand for more efficient travel will increase and this should bode well for the business aviation industry in the long run. We think range will continue to be key as you continue to see the development of larger cabins and longer-range aircraft from the OEM's. |BAM

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