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NAVIGATING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

As I set out to write this, both President Trump and the First Lady have just been diagnosed as COVID positive. In the UK, we'd already had a clear signal that this virus was no respecter of position when Prime Minister Boris Johnson came down with COVID and ended up fighting for his life in hospital.

The latest news throws a real shadow over the election, which is less than a month away, even though, 24 hours on, both the President and the First Lady remain symptom free. The news creates yet more uncertainty in what was already a difficult time. However, business aviation has stayed strong through the turmoil, as our interviews in this issue demonstrate so clearly.

Companies have taken the steps they needed to take to keep their staff, suppliers, and customers as safe as possible. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence of a strong uptick in the demand for charter. The American economy, the world's largest, looks to be on the mend after the devastation of the lock-down, with the jobless rate dropping below 8 percent in September's Non-Farm Payrolls announcement, a key metric for the markets.

It seems very likely that we won't come out from the shadow of COVID until there are massive stocks of an effective antivirus vaccination available. Optimists say this could happen before the end of the year, others think the second quarter or even the third or fourth quarters of 2021 represent a more likely timeframe.

With this in mind, MEBAA's decision to move this year's show to February next year looks more hopeful than likely, though one can always hope. One thing is for sure. With all the big shows cancelled through 2020, and probably on into 2021, companies in the business aviation sector need to look for every opportunity to keep their brand visible and strong in the eyes of customers and the industry at large.

It has to be said that the business aviation press generally has been doing an excellent job through the COVID crisis to provide branding opportunities for clients. We at BAM have been working flat out to play our part and to help our clients to stay visible and on top, as our Fall issue amply demonstrates.

We'd like to thank our friends in the industry for making it possible for us to come through this period in good form and in good financial health – this at a time when major brands out there are having to either close their doors or shed staff by the hundreds and even the thousands. Thank you all and may you grow in strength through these difficult times.

ANTHONY HARRINGTON


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AUTUMN ISSUE 15 2020

- 10** Inspired growth
Neil Book, President and CEO of Jet Support Services Inc., on growing a world class aircraft parts operation
- 18** Selling through the storm
Brad Harris, CEO, Dallas Jet International, talks about jet transactions through the pandemic and the new normal
- 24** Winning awards
Gregory J. Schmidt, President and CEO of Pentastar Aviation, on the strategic direction and long-term growth of the company
- 30** Nothing but the best
Nothing but the best: Roger Woolsey, CEO of Million Air, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's history, growth and ambitions
- 36** 109 and going strong
Marc Drobny, President of StandardAero's Business Aviation division, on growing through and post the pandemic
- 40** All you can eat
James Person, Senior Director of Global Business Development for Viasat's Business Aviation division, on 'uncapping' Viasat's Ka-band services
- 44** Navigating through the storm
Jim Hansen, Founder and CEO of Western Jet Aviation, on the global pandemic and the uncertain recovery
- 48** Oil price disturbances
Craig Sincock, President and CEO at Avfuel, talks to BAM about the pandemic and its impact on the demand for fuel
- 52** One-stop-shop
Greg Sahr, President and CEO of Elliott Aviation, talks to Anthony Harrington about running a one-stop-shop for jets



- 58** Jewel in the Crown
Madonna W. Y. Fung, General Manager, Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC), talks to BAM about developing a world-class VIP hub
- 64** Innovating the future
Neil Boehm, Chief Technology Officer and VP of Engineering at Gentex, talks about the company's game-changing innovations for business aviation
- 68** Steady as she goes
Sean Peterson, General Manager of Pro Star Aviation, talks about his company's early years and its ambitions post-COVID



- 72** Safe landing
Simon Caldecott, CEO of Piper Aircraft, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's successful return to fortune and its new auto-land capability

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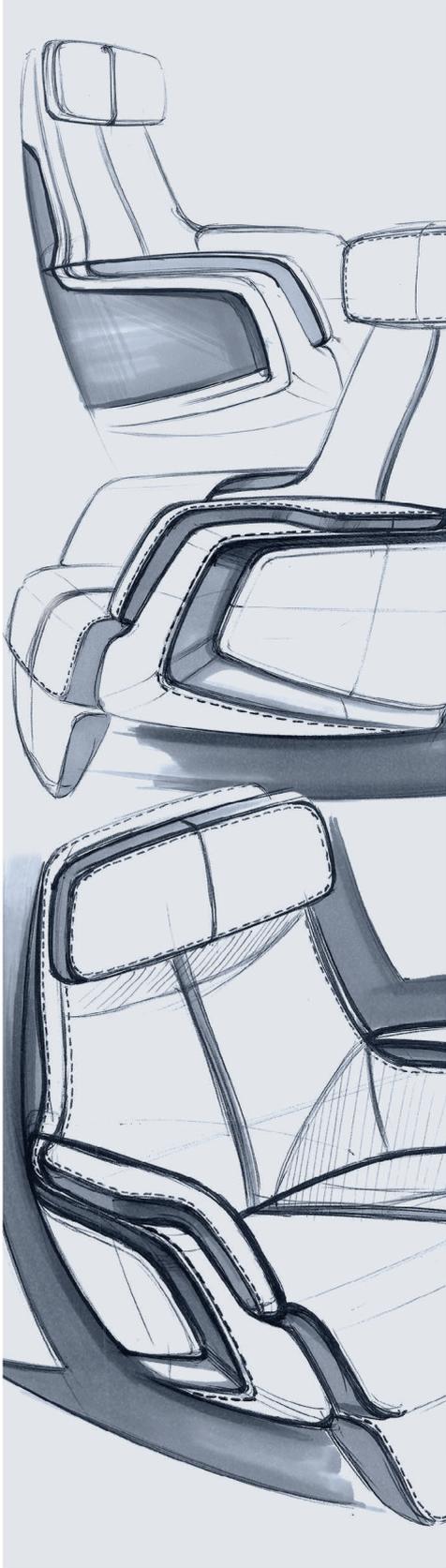
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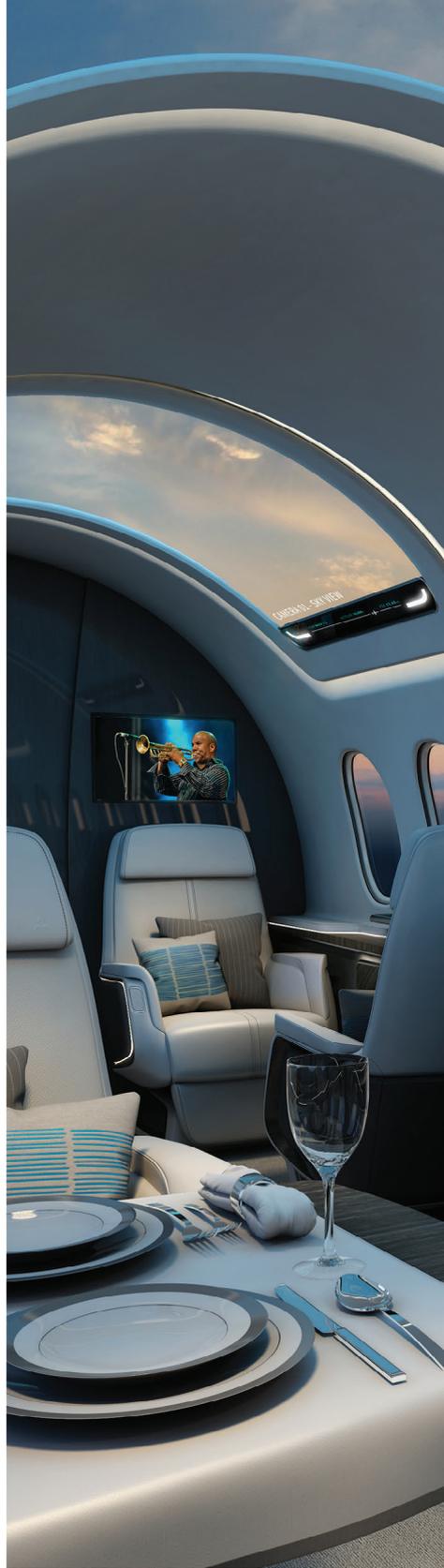
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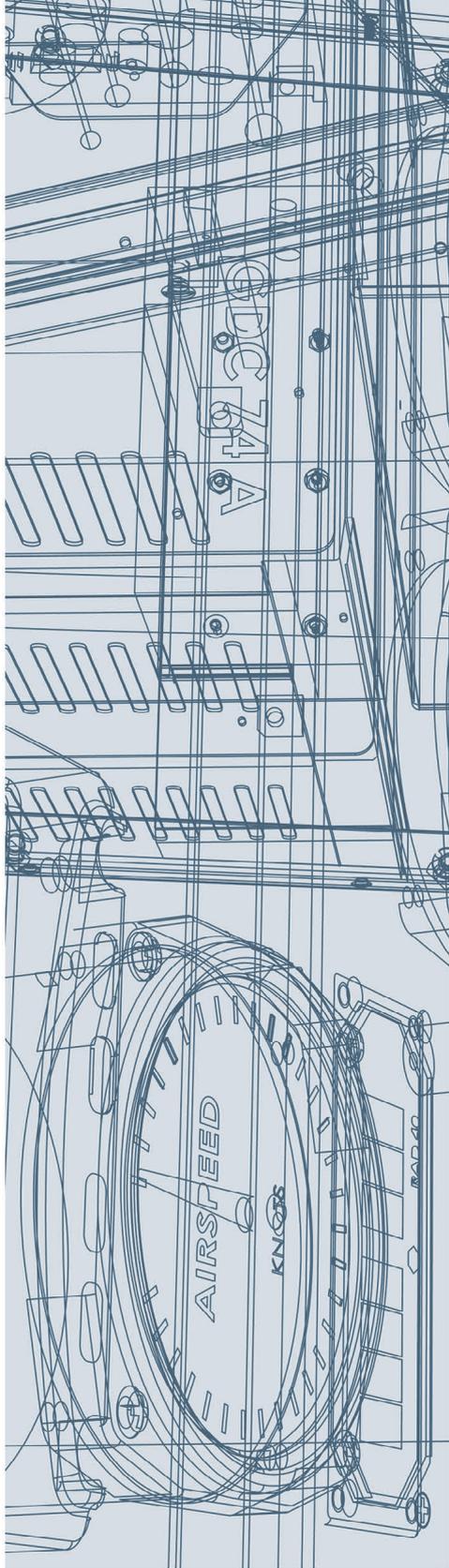
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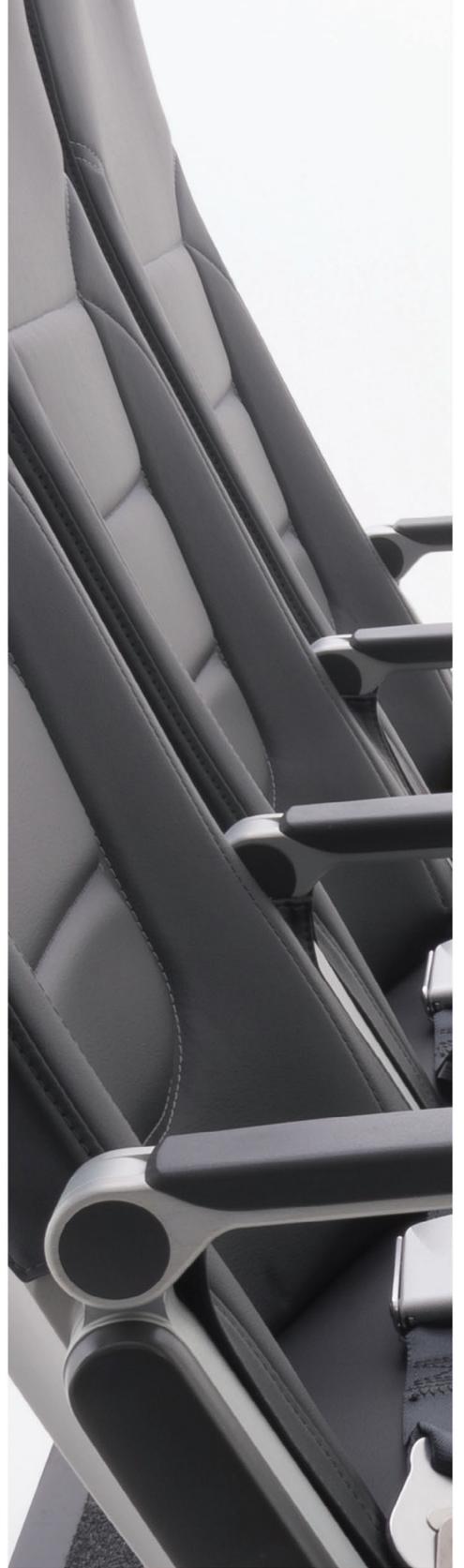
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INSPIRED GROWTH

Neil Book, President and CEO,
talks to Anthony Harrington about
the evolution of JSSI

AH: Neil, before we look at some of the exciting things you have planned for JSSI through into 2021, what was the past year like for you, and in particular, what was JSSI's experience through the pandemic?

NB: The past year has been challenging for all of us and once again we've learned the lesson that the world can change in an instant. My experience has been quite mixed. It's been hard to watch many of our customers struggle during this health crisis and economic downturn. We moved very quickly in March to offer tangible financial relief to clients, by holding 2019 hourly rates, reducing flight hour minimums, and offering extended payment terms.

At the same time, we had to deal with our own business challenges. Our largest business is undoubtedly hourly cost maintenance programs and that has been a wild ride. Flight hours dropped off a cliff in March and throughout the second quarter as borders closed and business travel came to a complete halt.

“We moved very quickly in March to offer tangible financial relief to clients, by holding 2019 hourly rates, reducing flight hour minimums, and offering extended payment terms.”



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As a result, our largest revenue stream experienced sharp declines, which forced us to look at every facet of the business and to drive behaviors that allowed us to manage our operations more efficiently. Many of the processes we've put in place will stay in place going forward.

Fortunately, we've seen flight hours improve steadily over the last few months and we expect this trend to continue.

I am very proud to say that we have not had to reduce headcount for COVID-related reasons. In fact, our 300 employees around the world have come together through tireless work to ensure the long-term health of our business.

During those dark days of March and April, when there was so much uncertainty, we had one example after another of our people making personal sacrifices for the well-being of their colleagues. I had members of our team literally refuse to submit expenses in an effort to help the company and their teammates. There was truly a feeling of we're all in this together. Now, with things improving, we're back in growth mode. We are starting to hire again and focus on opportunities to expand the business.

AH: That is great to hear. Where do you see growth coming from?

NB: Undoubtedly, one of the biggest opportunities for us right now and for some years to come lies with our parts

trading, engine leasing, and supply chain solutions businesses. We have set our sights firmly on the goal of becoming a leader in the parts and end-of-life aircraft solutions market. Another key focus is growing our appraisal, consulting and data services business through the Conklin & de Decker, Advisory Services, and Tracware brands.

I think a lot of people would be surprised to learn that we've acquired approximately 25 aircraft for teardown in the last two years alone. It has allowed us to build a very healthy parts inventory and engine and APU leasing pool to help service both JSSI hourly cost maintenance customers and third parties.

The growth of JSSI Parts & Leasing over the last five years has been extraordinary. We feel this latest market disruption is an opportunity to put our foot on the accelerator and take the business through its next generation of growth. To do so, it requires the eye, mentality, and experience of someone with a wide cross-section of trading experience.

I am so pleased that my good friend Ben Hockenbergh has joined us as President of JSSI Parts & Leasing. Ben will be working alongside Jim Sellers, who has moved into the role of Chief Commercial Officer. Ben has worked for a number of hedge and private equity funds, and brings with him an institutional and process-driven approach to our trading business.



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AH: How big do you think the parts side can become?

NB: In round numbers it's become a \$100 million-per-year topline business in five short years. Our focus now is on continuing to scale. We think over time it could grow to be as significant as the hourly cost maintenance side. We are uniquely well-positioned for growth as our current inventory supports 2,000 aircraft on a JSSI maintenance program, which includes virtually every make and model of turboprop and business jet available in the market over the last 30 years.

We've launched a service called Supply Chain Solutions, which has been very successful. Essentially, we allow operators to outsource their procurement function to JSSI. Our clients can reduce their costs and improve turn time while leveraging JSSI's systems, tools, inventory, and talent. We are responsible for supporting approximately 10% of the world's business jets. We understand how to get the right part to the right place at the right time. Now, our customers can leverage that expertise and scale for their own operation.

AH: How is the mainstream business doing now?

NB: I have been pleasantly surprised with the high volume of hourly cost maintenance enrollments. While

I don't have the statistics at my fingertips, it appears that both new and in-service deliveries have remained strong. As you can imagine, our best opportunity for an enrollment comes when a new aircraft is delivered, an in-service aircraft is sold, or when an operator is coming out of a major maintenance event.

Given that our sales team has not been traveling much over the last seven months, it is remarkable that our enrollments are comparable with 2019. I give so much credit to our incredible sales team for what they have achieved in this unique environment and I am eternally grateful to the operators who continually put their trust and faith in JSSI.

Just an aside, I am convinced that the way we work in the future is going to change dramatically as a result of our pandemic experience. We see a lot of opportunity to reduce the number or size of our offices around the world. We believe we can operate as effectively in less space, with more employees working remotely. We're an hourly cost maintenance company. When I think about driving costs savings and efficiencies, I think about being able to offer our clients lower rates as a result of these measures.



“We are responsible for supporting approximately 10% of the world's business jets. We understand how to get the right part to the right place at the right time. Now, our customers can leverage that expertise and scale for their own operation.**”**

AH: And the data services side? What is happening there?

NB: Before getting into the aviation space, I had spent my career in the technology sector. One of the things that attracted me to JSSI was the potential to unlock the value of decades of component-level data that sat within the walls of the company. This data, coupled with our acquisitions of Conklin & de Decker and Tracware, has allowed that side of the business to come together in a meaningful way.

We have been able to integrate all of our Conklin & de Decker reporting with JSSI's maintenance data, while migrating its offering to the cloud. We think we can lead the charge in making operating cost data readily available to the broader market. There has been an utter lack of data transparency in business aviation, often stunting the overall growth of the industry. Operators need to understand the real costs associated with private aircraft ownership.

Because of COVID, we have so many new entrants flying privately for the first time. Let's ensure they have a good experience, so they don't run right back to the airlines the second it's a feasible and safe alternative. We are committed

as a company to bringing proper transparency to this market, so operators can make informed decisions.

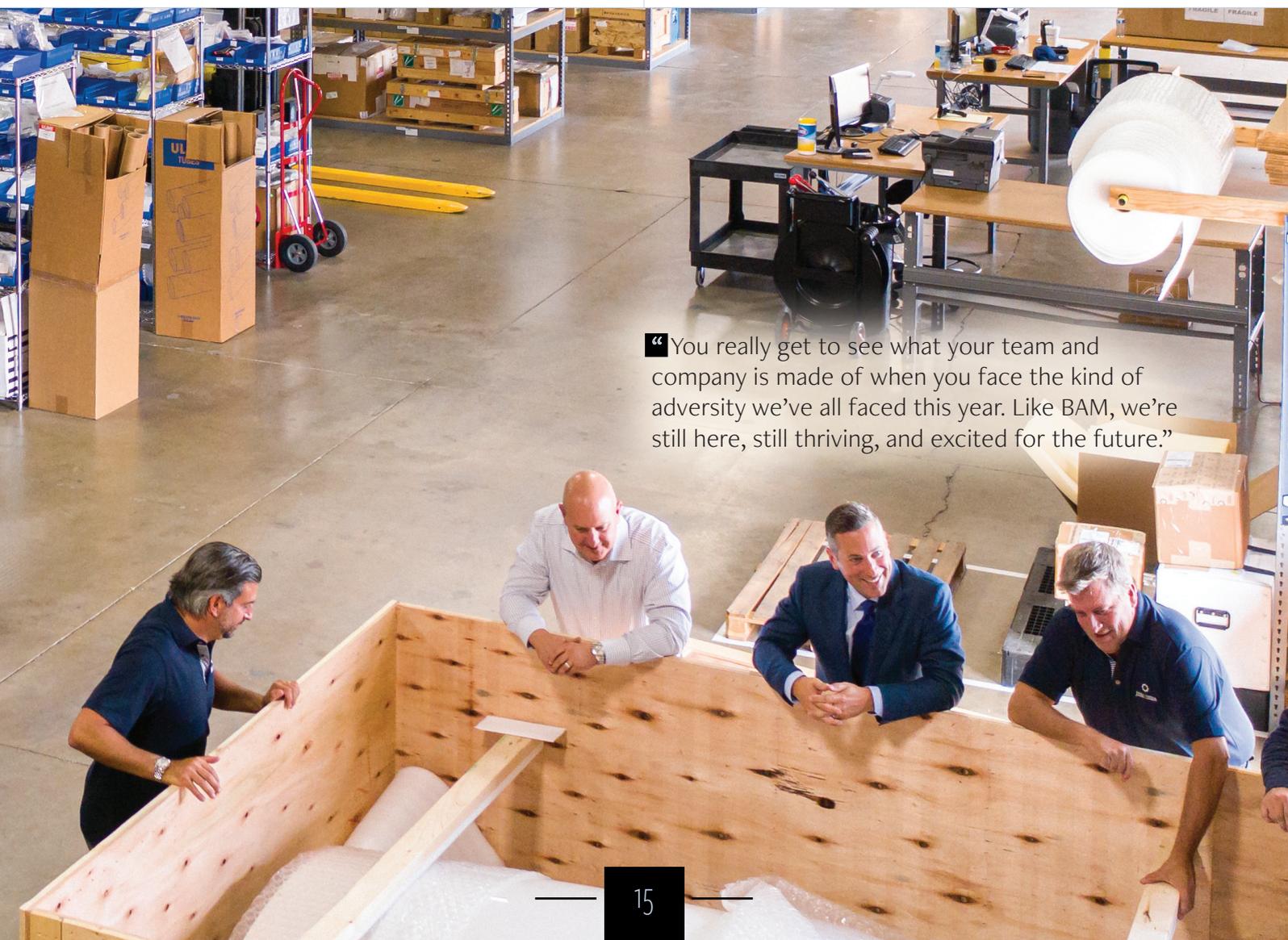
AH: How important is the broker community to JSSI?

NB: The broker community is hugely important. They represent one of our largest sources of referrals for the hourly cost maintenance business. We also have started buying a lot of aircraft for our engine leasing pool and parts. As a result, we've been an active buyer partnering closely with the broker community.

AH: How is your aircraft advisory services and appraisals side going?

NB: Advisory Services is growing in leaps and bounds. We now have one of the largest teams of ASA-accredited appraisers in the industry, with 50 on staff and strategically located around the world. We are performing in excess of 100 appraisals per year, with bandwidth to expand.

We also have a service called Maintenance Event Management, where operators not on a maintenance program can still leverage our expertise and buying power. We select the MRO facility, manage the event, and audit the invoices on behalf of our clients. We have generated millions of dollars



“You really get to see what your team and company is made of when you face the kind of adversity we've all faced this year. Like BAM, we're still here, still thriving, and excited for the future.”**”**

in savings for our clients by leveraging our parts inventory, negotiated labor rates, and invoice auditing capabilities. We are also working closely with some of the leading insurance underwriters to help them manage their claims, the actual maintenance repairs, and overall case management.

For 25 years, JSSI provided maintenance programs to the business aviation industry and nothing else. We've worked very hard to become a multi-faceted business that can create value for operators across the entire aircraft life cycle.

Here's an example. We want every buyer to leverage our Conklin & de Decker services when thinking about the aircraft that makes sense for their operation. We will deliver an in-depth comparison between aircraft to ensure they buy the aircraft that meets their unique profile, while fully understanding the operating costs.

Once you buy the aircraft, we can support you through our maintenance programs and with parts for non-covered

events. When it's time to sell, we'll appraise the aircraft and watch it sell with a higher residual value as a result of our programs. Of course, if the aircraft is approaching its end of life we'll see if it makes sense to buy it directly.

AH: JSSI was recognised by Deloitte as a US Best Managed Company this year, how did it feel for your team to win this award?

NB: It always feels good to be recognised for hard work, performance, and culture. We received this award in February based on our 2019 performance and although my team is definitely deserving, I must say I'm far prouder of what they have achieved this year since the pandemic.

It's easy to have a great corporate culture and strong results when you've got a healthy global economy. High tide lifts all boats, but you really get to see what your team and company is made of when you face the kind of adversity we've all faced this year. Like BAM, we're still here, still thriving, and excited for the future. |BAM

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“We want every buyer to leverage our Conklin & de Decker services when thinking about the aircraft that makes sense for their operation.”





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Brad Harris, CEO, Dallas Jet International, talks about jet transactions through the pandemic and the new normal

SELLING THROUGH THE STORM



AH: We've all been through a strange period thanks to COVID. How have things been for you and Dallas Jet International?

BH: I have to say that we have done very well through this pandemic. If the second half to 2020 is as good as the first half, this will be the second-best year, revenue-wise, for Dallas Jet International over the past 28 years.

The first two weeks after the US went into 'shelter at home' mode, I was on the phone non-stop; talking to clients who were worried about the impact on aircraft values. As it turns out, we have not seen anything like the panic and the falling-off-a-cliff drop in aircraft values that we saw in the 2008/9 global financial crisis.

Back then, we saw supply in the pre-owned market jump to 12 to 14 percent. Now we have around five percent supply. At the beginning of the COVID-crisis, we had six clients that sold their aircraft prior to COVID and that were flying the airlines that contacted us to acquire them an aircraft

post-COVID, ranging from Gulfstreams to King Airs; this was a real shot in the arm for Dallas Jet International.

Right now, we have two aircraft-owning clients inquiring about acquiring an additional, smaller aircraft, while other clients are looking to upgrade their existing aircraft. Of the two clients who want additional aircraft, one currently owns a Gulfstream G280. He has projects all over the US and specialises in acquiring businesses. The idea would be to put three or four of his team members on the smaller plane, from places like Chicago to New York, with a multi-day stopover to perform due diligence on a prospective business purchase.

He feels there is too high of a risk to fly his executives commercially. He would like to eliminate the possibility of exposing executives and their families to quarantine because some commercial passenger or crew tested positive for COVID. This way of reasoning, coupled with the need for an additional aircraft, is becoming a common theme in private aviation.

“I have to say that we have done very well through this pandemic. If the second half to 2020 is as good as the first half, this will be the second-best year, revenue-wise, for Dallas Jet International over the past 28 years.”



AH: All this is coming in an election year? Are you seeing a double whammy here?

BH: Historically, as we go through the runup to an election, people would sit on the fence, as far as aircraft transactions were concerned. However, this time around has not had its normal impact. There are a couple of reasons for this besides COVID.

I was talking to a prominent business aviation attorney recently who made the point that we are going to have a great end to 2020 irrespective of who wins the election. If Trump wins, then his pro-business aviation attitude will boost the industry. Who wouldn't want to get the full \$20 million purchase price of a mid-sized jet taken off their taxes in the first year, if the jet is used for their business? A Biden victory will have everyone rushing to complete transactions because they are worried he will withdraw the 100-percent accelerated depreciation rules put into place by President Trump.



AH: Have you seen any noticeable fall in pre-owned prices?

BH: There were some good deals to be had in the early days of the pandemic. We bought several aircraft that were very good deals for our clients. Those deals no longer exist. There has been some small depreciation in prices since COVID, but no more than four to five percent. Right now, all the good deals seem to have gone and it is really hard to find good aircraft at a decent price in some segments of the market.

There are not a lot of people getting out of aircraft ownership without moving instead to charter or fractional ownership, which still does some good for the industry.

AH: What is your sense of how the fractional market is doing?

BH: I believe that they are still not one hundred percent up to the flying levels they were at pre-COVID, but on the other hand, they are probably selling more fractional shares over the last two months or so than they were selling for the same months in 2019, so it is definitely coming back.

Conducting international transactions is difficult right now, with all the quarantines and flight restrictions. We have to hire more consultants now to get a deal over the line. We are working a transaction right now with a buyer in Dubai. He had to hire a firm to do his visual inspection of the aircraft and another firm to do a pre-buy inspection because his chief pilot and director of maintenance cannot get into the US right now.

With that said, I do expect this sale to go through. We have flown the aircraft to West Star Aviation who will prepare it for the pre-

buy. Post-closing, the international buyer will have to hire contract pilots to fly to its delivery location. Dallas Jet International will be representing the seller by having one of our team members on-site for the showing, the test flight, and for the closing. This is all part of the value-added that Dallas Jet International provides.

AH: I believe you use AIC Title Service for your transactions. How did you meet Clay and Holly?

BH: It was probably 10 to 12 years ago when I first met Clay. We started working together and we became friends. Since Clay has been at AIC, he has built it into a great business. He invested heavily in technology and has put together a terrific team.

AIC's virtual closing room is a tremendous resource and transaction facilitator for both buyers and sellers. It is very secure and both sides get to see a lot of information as to where the transaction currently stands, from the opening moments of the deal to its completion. Aircraft transactions are very paper-heavy and having all the documentation in the virtual closing room, together with AIC's escrow services, is a tremendous aid to any transaction.

Clay and his wife, Holly have invested a lot of time and money into the business and it shows in a remarkable way. They've spoken on a lot of aviation panels, which helps the industry to become informed about what is involved in aircraft transactions and why an exceptional transaction facilitation service and a strong secure escrow service is so important.



“ We have flown the aircraft to West Star Aviation who will prepare it for the pre-buy.”

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AH: How does it work for you?

BH: AIC gets involved from the moment that we have an executed Letter of Intent. The deposit securing the transaction goes into escrow and AIC starts the documentation collection for that transaction. They work with the buyer and the seller. Each side can decide what documents they want to hold privately and what they want to make available to the other side, but both parties can see exactly where the transaction is and what is still required at any point in time.

For example, you will receive confirmation of the deposit, you can see if the Bill of Sale is in escrow; and, you can see any liens or comments on the aircraft, title searches on the engines, etc. Every key fact is available on a single page.

I was particularly pleased when, along with Eric Lewin, they put together the European Global Closing Room, which provides the same level of support as AIC’s platform, in terms



of transaction facilitation services outside of the United States. We have used this on several occasions already and it has been a valid aid and enabler.

AH: What has it been like delivering aircraft to the buyer during the pandemic?

BH: When COVID first hit, we all stopped everything for about two or three weeks. The aviation industry hit a pause. Some aircraft went to MROs to have maintenance performed or equipment upgrades, so those guys were busy, but then almost out of the blue, the transactions started up again.

When COVID hit the United States, we were just completing a Gulfstream G550 acquisition. For the first three weeks, no one was allowed to go near the seller’s hangar. As you can imagine, the whole thing was surrounded by safety precautions. For pre-buy, the seller had a crew fly the jet to Gulfstream in Appleton, Wisconsin and I flew commercial to Milwaukee and drove to Appleton.

The crew who flew the jet in were not allowed into the facility. They were escorted from the ramp to their rental car. The plane had to be sterilized at a cost of \$600 before it could be inspected. I had several Zoom calls with the seller’s team, my buyer’s team, and Gulfstream.

“ AIC gets involved from the moment that we have an executed Letter of Intent. The deposit securing the transaction goes into escrow and AIC starts the documentation collection for that transaction.”

Throughout the pandemic, I have flown the commercial airlines approximately 20 times. Sometimes the aircraft is nearly empty. On one particular commercial flight I was on, there were just myself and four other passengers on a 737. Not even a week later, I was coming back to Dallas from Chicago and the American Airlines flight was full! However, I have witnessed the airline schedules shrink dramatically, which makes it difficult at times to book travel.

AH: Are you optimistic about the rest of the year and the first half of 2021?

BH: I am very optimistic about the rest of this year, but I think we will have to wait and see about Q1 and Q2 of 2021. What concerns me is the way the national debt has skyrocketed through the pandemic. My kids and grandkids are going to have to deal with this. We’re spending tomorrow’s money, and that’s not healthy on a domestic budget and it is just as unhealthy on the United States’ national budget. |BAM

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WINNING AWARDS

Gregory J. Schmidt, President and CEO of Pentastar Aviation, on the strategic direction and long-term growth of the company

Q: Can you give us a quick recap of the history of Pentastar?

GS: Sure. The company was originally the internal flight department of the Chrysler Corporation. They ended up with a fleet of around seven aircraft to help them support their automotive businesses across the United States. The company was founded in 1964, which, by way of providing a context, was the same year that the Beatles visited the USA! It was also the year that Ford Motor Company unveiled the Ford Mustang.

Over the years, the flight department expanded to provide services for other jet owners and began competing in the retail aviation services market. In 2001, Edsel B. Ford II, the great-grandson of Henry Ford, purchased the company to pursue his passion for

aviation, so the business has some neat history behind it. Mr. Ford is the Chairman and owner of our company.

Today, we look quite a bit different as an organization from those early days in the 1960s. We are the premier provider of aviation services in Michigan. We provide services for operators and owners throughout the region as well as having numerous local clients.

We also provide a wide array of services to both corporate flight departments and air ambulance operators. Our services include our award winning FBO, in-house Fivestar Gourmet® catering, plus aircraft management, charter, advisory services, MRO, avionics, and interior services. Our vision statement says that we will 'Set the standard for delivering world-class aviation services' and that is what we strive every day to live up to.

When we first formulated that vision, I thought it was a large claim to make, but we have backed it up with consistent top-quality service delivery every year since. For more than a decade we have been the most awarded FBO in both ProPilot's and Aviation International News's survey of FBOs. And in 2019 we were the highest rated FBO in the world, which we were very proud of. Creating customer satisfaction is at the forefront of everything that we do.

Q: How important is aircraft charter services to your business?

GS: Charter is a very important part of the services we provide to owners as part of our aircraft management offering.

PENTASTAR *Aviation*



“ For more than a decade we have been the most awarded FBO in both ProPilot’s and Aviation International News’s survey of FBOs. And in 2019 we were the highest rated FBO in the world, which we were very proud of.”

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Gregory J. Schmidt,
President and CEO,
Pentastar Aviation

We have a very robust charter sales force that enables us to provide clients with charter services anywhere in the world. It is not our primary revenue source, but it is an important revenue generator both for ourselves and for our clients.

Q: How well has Pentastar coped through the pandemic. How do you think things will play out through the rest of 2020?

GS: Like most businesses here in the US, when COVID first came on the radar in February, we were looking at an international problem that might make its way to the US at some point. Now, six months on, it is quite clear that the pandemic has changed the world fundamentally and still has some way to run.

What we did here at Pentastar was pretty much what a lot of sensible businesses did. We adopted very stringent health and safety practices to protect both our staff and clients. As a result, we have had very little employees contract the virus.

As to its impact on the business, while the volumes in some of our lines of business are still below what they were before the pandemic, we are seeing opportunities. One of the best performing areas of the business for us right now is charter. We are seeing a surge in new customers that are chartering aircraft for the first time. These are people who would have flown First Class commercially in the past, but who now have a heightened precaution and would like to avoid crowded airports or risk contact with other passengers in a packed airliner.

In addition to our FBO here north of the Detroit area, in Waterford, we have also opened an office to help support our aircraft management and charter business on the west side of Michigan. That also brings in business for the maintenance side, and it is doing very well for us.

Q: What has your experience been as far as demand for MRO services is concerned?

GS: Very early on in the pandemic, in mid-March, we saw a slight slackening of demand for MRO as everyone in the industry hunkered down, and aircraft were grounded. Then people realised that this virus was going to carry on longer than short-term and they started seizing the opportunity to get things done on their jet while it was not being utilised. Demand for maintenance, interior upgrades and avionics upgrades picked up noticeably and we have been fairly busy through the last six months.

At the same time, as far as our FBO is concerned, we have obviously seen a falling off in flight hours and fuel sales, so the overall result has been mixed. Charter, on the other hand, has recovered nicely and as we look forward, we feel that we have capitalised on our opportunities as much as we could possibly have expected over this strange period.

We're now seeing a slight pullback from demand on the maintenance side as flight hours and cycle times drag out a bit. That inevitably adds up to a softening in MRO demand.

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Q: What are your expectations for the third and fourth quarters of 2020 and on into 2021?

GS: It is hard to give a single answer to predictions of that sort. For maintenance alone, we can probably expect to see demand off some 30 to 35 percent over the next nine months or so. But we are already seeing volumes picking up through our FBO and charter has returned to normal levels and looks healthy. So, we see a balancing up of the business. What is very pleasing is that we are seeing a good number of first-time charter users.

Having a diversified business stream has been incredibly important to us in weathering the COVID storm. There were days when we looked at the ramp and we weren't selling a gallon of fuel, but at the same time, the maintenance shop was working and generating overtime.

Q: How is the advisory side of your business doing?

GS: Our aircraft management services have seen a strong increase. We recently added three new aircraft to our stable, so we now have just under 30 aircraft under management.

“Our aircraft management services have seen a strong increase. We recently added three new aircraft to our stable, so we now have just under 30 aircraft under management.”



This grew steadily through the pandemic and it has given us the opportunity to show new clients just how much value-add Pentastar can provide.

On the transaction side, the big interest for people entering the market has been at the turboprop and light jet side of the scale. These are people who have the wherewithal to own a light jet but who

had previously chartered. Now they don't want to utilize an aircraft that is being used by others so becoming an aircraft owner has a big appeal to them.

On the large cabin side, the story has been reversed. With limited opportunities for travel, with so many countries having imposed travel restrictions, demand has generally softened.

Q: Are you optimistic, looking forward?

GS: Yes, regardless of the outcome of the upcoming election and despite the challenges we have faced through this global pandemic, we are more than confident we can continue to provide the world-class services we have become known for and anticipate a continued recovery and a bright 2021. |BAM





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NOTHING BUT THE BEST

Roger Woolsey, CEO of Million Air, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's history, growth and ambitions

AH: Let's turn to the origins of Million Air. How did the idea of building a chain of premier FBOs come about?

RW: I was a pilot at the age of nineteen and was lucky enough to be flying Stevie Nicks and Fleetwood Mac about on tour. On the one hand, there was the luxury and glamour you'd associate with a leading rock band. On the other hand, what was blindingly clear to me as we landed at one private airport after another, was the contrast between what those stops offered and the luxury of the hotels and venues my clients were going to.

FBOs in those days were like trucker cafes without the finesse. They were bare concrete with little or no amenities. Some of the wealthiest people in the world were flying into these FBOs and getting out of them as fast as they could. There was a clear need for a completely different approach. So, what should an FBO that was fit for purpose look like?

When we took this on, the first step was to define the brand we wanted to place before the world. How do you do this? Close your eyes and ask yourself what you want people to see, feel and touch



“Some of the wealthiest people in the world were flying into these FBOs and getting out of them as fast as they could. There was a clear need for a completely different approach.”



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when they are in your FBO. Now design everything in the business to make all of that come true. This needs to extend out to embrace everything you do, your body posture, how you greet people and respond to their requests as well as all the technical things like refuelling their aircraft.

Everything in the FBO that you are designing has to walk and talk the brand. Then, when we've designed it all to that level, we have to have the processes in place to implement that all day every day to the same high standard. When we started out, I literally lived on the road for several years overseeing the build-out and staffing of our growing FBO portfolio. You have to get the systems and processes right and the culture. When you've achieved this in a way that really does add value for the VIP in the back of the aircraft, then the next step is to grow by reproducing the same high-quality brand and culture in each new FBO.

What we did was innovative because it had to be. I've always loved the Henry Ford quote: "If I'd asked the customer what they wanted by way of better transport, they'd have said faster horses." You have to think beyond what people are accustomed to. Those old-style FBOs were more convenient than flying into a crowded mainstream passenger airport, the same way a trucker café offers a certain level of convenience. But imagining that that is the best that can be done is laughable.

30 years ago an FBO was just a necessity to fuel up the jet and to transfer your customers from one location to another. What we did was to recognize that the chief pilot is focused on giving his or her VIP passengers a great and safe experience. We're trying to extend that all the way to the street beyond the FBO by becoming part of that enjoyable, luxurious experience.

AH: Million Air is well known for the luxury branding you present inside your FBOs, with many of the world's top luxury brands featured on your wall-sized display TV screens. Was that hard to get going?

RM: We really struggled at first with that. When we first approached Jaguar, for example, and said we wanted to feature



their top of the range cars, they rejected the idea. They told us: We can go down to the local shopping mall and get thousands of people a day looking at our cars. How many people go through your FBOs a day?

It took us a while to get the message across to them that yes, you get more footfall in a shopping mall. But how many of those people can afford your top cars? With us, you know that one hundred percent of our customers can afford your cars. There's the difference. The argument is irresistible and after a bit, they run out of objections.

When we defined our branding, which is to say, the kinds of products we wanted to feature in our FBO, we were quite clear we wanted the best. Not just any car, but the top cars; not just any coffee in our FBO, but the best brands.

The idea of having video walls in the FBO was a natural follow-on from the recognition that what we had passing through our FBOs were the most coveted eyeballs in the world. If you are a luxury goods provider, these are the people you really want to see your products. Plus there is the fact that

our FBO presents a nice relaxed setting. This is not like an inflight magazine, with gum stuck between pages 12 and 14!

The video walls also give us the opportunity to present VVIP clients with a strikingly memorable experience when they visit us. When the President of Panama flew in on their VIP Head of State aircraft, for example, the entire video wall displayed the Panamanian flag flying in the breeze and the anthem played as he entered. So that meant a lot to him and created a great moment.

Similarly, if we have the CEO of one of the global blue-chip companies arriving, we can craft a welcome video just for them. There is a famous furniture entrepreneur here in the US known as Mattress Mac. He had a horse, Run Happy, that won the Triple Races here. He went to the restroom in the FBO and when he came out we had the whole wall paying Run Happy. He was deeply moved and we'd created another great moment for a valued customer.



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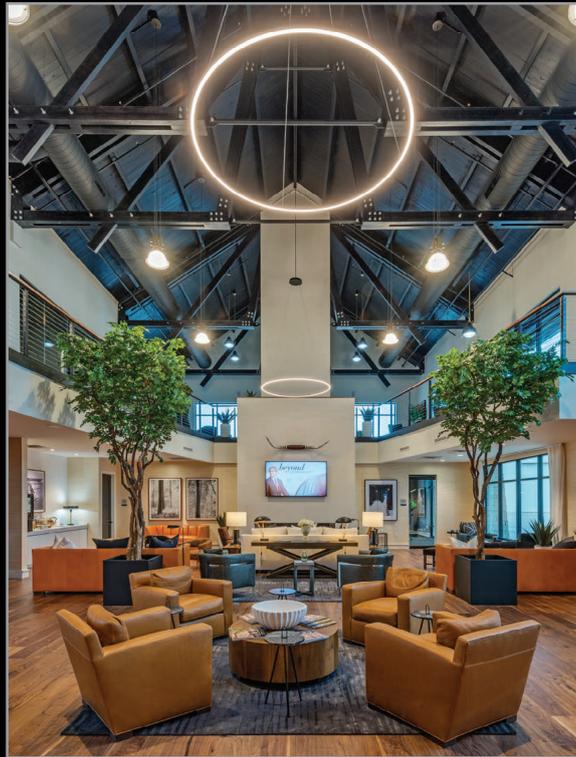
AH: How many FBOs do you have now in your portfolio?

RW: We have 25 FBOs in mainland US plus FBOs in Columbia, Puerto Rico, and China, making a total of 32 in all, so far. We're working on a project in Europe right now. However, we are not growing for the sake of growth. We're focused on growing quality, where we can add value. And we only grow at the speed that our capital base allows.

We try really hard to be the up-market, best-in-class brand, the Four Seasons of our industry, as it were. At the same time, we also focus on staying humble and checking ourselves constantly to see that we are living up to the standards we have set, every day, all day.

AH: How do you think you rate against the competition? There are some pretty good FBOs out there.

RW: We're a bunch of pilots here at Million Air so we get to see the competition a lot. Recently I flew my Citation to three countries and four cities, so I am a customer of my competition on a regular basis. I know what it's like being a pilot and landing at an FBO, and I know what I want and expect when I get there. If I'm not having a great experience I'd be thinking, I wish I had a proper coffee instead of a mug of this stuff that's been brewing for several hours.



The point is, you have to invest very significantly to make a great experience happen. No one wants their aircraft scratched when it is being moved, for example, so you need two people involved, so one can wing walk the aircraft, which is being moved with state of the art equipment. You have to be inventive. We have an indoor golf simulator in one of our FBOs. We have Starbucks in others. Again, it's all about creating a great experience.

AH: Do you expect to see a boost in private flying as a result of COVID?

RW: Absolutely. Anyone flying commercial airlines is going to have hundreds of touchpoints with other people, which massively raises the risk of infection, by comparison

with flying private, where the touchpoints are very limited and much more easily controlled.

Corporate aviation needs to brace itself for a massive increase in first-time charter passengers, who will be nudged in this direction by the threat of COVID. What they thought of as a luxury will very quickly come to seem to them to be a necessity. I really believe we are going to see explosive growth in our space. **BAM**





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109 AND GOING STRONG

Marc Drobny, President of StandardAero's Business Aviation division, on growing through and post the pandemic

Q: Marc, let's begin by looking at how StandardAero has come through the pandemic so far?

MD: To date, we have done rather well and whatever damage COVID has done elsewhere, it hasn't treated us badly. We have had very little exposure to it, with no outbreaks or anything like that.

This has been particularly important for us as the vast majority of our team are hands-on technical experts here in the shop. From the beginning, we took a lot of steps to keep people protected and that has worked well. As far as our business is



concerned, we have actually done incredibly well. StandardAero has a division that focuses on commercial aviation and they have seen some rough patches. But on the business aviation side, we've done really well.

What we have seen is that a number of customers took the opportunity to bring forward service or refurbishment projects while their aircraft were being under-utilised or not flying at all because of all the restrictions. That helped us enormously and now, with the industry back to around 85 percent of its historical productivity levels, we are quite positive and optimistic about the rest of 2020.

We expect to see that the year as a whole will show some reduction in flight hours, by comparison with recent times, so we expect our engine repairs business to slow down a bit through the end of 2020. But apart from that, everything is looking pretty healthy. I would not be surprised to find that by the end of the year or somewhere in Q1 or Q2 2021 business is actually up on the pre-COVID levels.

Q: Let's digress for a moment and look at StandardAero's history. How has it become the large company it is today?

MD: StandardAero's roots go right back to 1911. We've been operating for 109 years, which comes as a surprise to some folks. Our roots are in Winnipeg, where the company started out doing machine work, largely for the trucking sector. Then it migrated into aviation and over the course of a century, it has grown into an organisation with nearly 6,000 employees and a turnover approaching \$4 billion, prior to COVID.

So, we have become quite a large, independent MRO, with capabilities that range from business aviation to military and commercial jets. Our client base is world-wide. Our biggest single campus is Winnipeg, and we have a large centre in San Antonio, Texas, and locations in Houston, Springfield Illinois and Fleetlands in the UK. We have a large operation in the UK along with six or seven locations elsewhere in Europe.

Our Fleetlands location has certifications from Honeywell and Pratt and we do a lot of work on the engines from those OEMs. We also have a business aviation footprint in the Netherlands and near Paris. These locations are principally focused on providing mobile services. The teams there will go to the client's hangar to do engine servicing.

Q: What about refurbishments and paint?

MD: We do everything in the US, including refurbishments, aircraft painting and avionics. Everything that an aircraft needs, in short. In Europe, we focus solely on engine maintenance and overhaul. Here in the US, when you come into our shop you will see aircraft torn down to the bone, to the point where they hardly look like aircraft any more. Then we build them back up again and present it to the owner with a beautiful new interior.



“StandardAero's roots go right back to 1911. We've been operating for 109 years, which comes as a surprise to some folks.”



Q: How do you keep on top of such a large, far-flung operation, with multiple bases?

MD: It starts with having a really good team, and a very distributed network of leadership. All our teams are broken down into sub-groups, with everyone knowing what their skill sets are, and those of their colleagues in the group. At the core of it all, you need a common vision and sense of purpose, that is all about taking care of the customer and their asset. Everything starts and ends with doing right by the customer.

Then, on any particular job, we pull the resources together to fulfil the project and to meet the customer's needs. We often have collaboration between our sites despite them being thousands of miles apart. On a big project, the aircraft may come to us in Houston and the engines will go to the UK, while interior components that need refurbishment might go to Springfield Illinois. It is a tremendous source of strength for us, the way we all come together to bring all of our skills to bear on any particular project.

Q: When a customer's aircraft goes AOG, that is not going to be a happy conversation with your team, even if the customer likes and respects you. Is it?

MD: Clients tend to be very emotional and under a lot of pressure when they have an AOG, but with our experience, efficiency and expertise, we can help them manage the whole thing and get the solution going. One of the most time-consuming elements in most AOGs is actually getting the required part to the aircraft. We can have technicians on-site within the hour most times, but if we find we need parts shipped from halfway around the world that determines how quickly the aircraft can get back in the air.

Knowing where to source parts from quickly and how to get them to the aircraft makes a huge difference, and that is part of our expertise. It truly is a big deal in any AOG situation.

Q: How did you come into the business, Marc?

MD: I started out as a navy pilot. I was in the navy for a dozen years, flying F18s primarily. I also attended the Navy's test pilot

school and did about four years of flight testing for the navy, test flying anything you could put in or around an aeroplane.

After the military, I started with NetJets back in 2005 and worked for them in operational leadership roles. I was President of Executive Jet Management, based out of Cincinnati for them. Then I was recruited to take over the business jets side of things for StandardAero in 2018.

Q: How do you build customer loyalty and secure customer retention in an MRO business, where price is such a key factor for many owners and operators?

MD: You'd be surprised how much customer loyalty there is in the sector. Of course, everyone is looking for value, but the first time you deal with a customer you can tell pretty quickly if they are a value or a price-driven customer. It is not unusual for even long-standing clients to source quotes from competitors and we expect that. These aircraft are very expensive to take care of and maintain. However, we are always focused on proving to our customers that we are very good value for what we provide to them.

We know very well that there are a lot of alternatives out there, from the OEM's own facilities to OEM approved facilities and the rest of the independent MROs. However, building a great relationship with the customer counts. All the OEMs have been focused in recent years on trying to optimize their after-market business. None of them, however, has the capacity to serve the entirety of the after-market, and it would not be efficient for them to try. So we try to be OEM aligned and to be a partner with them instead of just being a competitor. That has helped us pretty well.

Over the last decade, if you take StandardAero as a whole, we have probably tripled in revenue and more than doubled in the last five years. We can probably do that again over the course of the next five years, and that is certainly our goal, along with maintaining the highest standards of customer service and satisfaction. [BAM](#)

Since publishing this story, Marc Drobny has moved to a different leadership role at StandardAero. He now serves as President of the company's Military MRO division.

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ALL YOU CAN EAT

James Person, Senior Director of Global Business Development for Viasat's Business Aviation division, on 'uncapping' Viasat's Ka-band services

AH: Offering customers an 'all you can eat' option in broadband to the aircraft cabin is huge. What led to that decision?

JP: This was our big news item for July 2020. Until now we have capped the service at 16Mbps delivered to the aircraft. Now we are saying that customers can receive as much broadband as our network and hardware are capable of delivering.

This has been very well received by our customer base. In fact, some aircraft have been recording 30 or 40 Mbps and more to the cabin. It means that more people on the aircraft can simultaneously stream content or browse the web without impacting the speeds enjoyed by other users in the cabin.

AH: How many passengers do you generally see on a business jet, since there will be a practical ceiling on the number of simultaneous users doing broadband intensive tasks?

JP: We are definitely seeing more passengers per plane over the last year, with perhaps some diminution through COVID. However, we don't count passengers, we count the number of devices in use during a flight, which is a fairly reliable proxy for passenger numbers.

What we are seeing is that corporations are opening up their jets to other levels of executives beyond just Board members. We have a corporate customer, for example, who has recently implemented a fleet of corporate shuttles. Their goal is to put more of their rank and file employees on those shuttles to protect them from having

to run the risks associated with using mainstream airports and commercial airlines.

We think this trend is going to grow and grow. And of course, many of those executives will want to use the time on the aircraft productively, which means they are going to need higher broadband speeds to the cabin.

AH: Do you have a 2021 launch date set for the first of your three ViaSat-3 satellites?

JP: We are targeting the launch of the first ViaSat-3 satellite to take place in CY 2021. However, what I'd like to emphasise is that while ViaSat-3 constellation will give us global coverage once all three satellites are in service, our existing ViaSat-2 network already gives us a massive capacity advantage over the rest of the competition. On top of this, the satellites we have today, together with our partner in Europe, gives us an 85 percent coverage of business jet flight hours already. With ViaSat-3, of course, we will have global coverage – minus the poles.

AH: Does your existing coverage enable you to handle multiple business jets heading through the same footprint without noticeable degradation in throughput to the cabin?

JP: We can handle 'busy hour' today without it impacting a user's connectivity experience in the cabin.



“Some aircraft have been recording 30 or 40 Mbps and more to the cabin. It means that more people on the aircraft can simultaneously stream content or browse the web without impacting the speeds enjoyed by other users in the cabin.”

Rather, the need for more capacity is being driven by two trends that we are seeing today. People are increasingly taking their streaming habits into the air. Additionally, charter operators are now attracting a lot of business from First Class on commercial airlines, and they tend to be very set on streaming as well. We are really nicely set up to support this demand, while the competition is struggling with very limited bandwidth.

AH: What about security? Are people worried about being hacked?

JP: Because we handle all of the security, our end users do not need to think about it. We have a long history providing secure broadband services to government, corporate and hi-tech company aircraft. Through our experience, we understand how to keep data secure, whether on a VPN network or not.

AH: Last time we spoke Viasat was celebrating getting the STC for the G280. Any further additions?

JP: I am happy to say that we are now also in Embraer's Praetor super-midsize aircraft. Both aircraft can cross the Atlantic and we are already seeing customers making transatlantic trips and making great use of our Ka-service. We have a number of in-service G280s, with the Viasat Ka-band solution installed. These systems offer 16 Mbps or better today, given our new uncapped rate. These speeds will increase to 32 Mbps with the ViaSat-3 constellation.

It is important to emphasise that Viasat is the only Ka-band solution that will fit on a super-mid-sized aircraft, so our work with Gulfstream and Embraer provides passengers aboard these aircraft with a unique and premium connectivity experience.

Additionally, we have very compact three line-replaceable LRUs that sit outside the pressurized areas of the cabin with a total weight of 55.4 pounds. The light weight demonstrates that this system respects the valuable real estate inside the aircraft. Only one of these pieces, the antenna, has to go into the tail, and we offer a DC or an AC version of that.

AH: How do you feel your Ka-band offering competes against air-to-ground (AtG) broadband offerings?

JP: What we see is people switching away from AtG systems. One of our

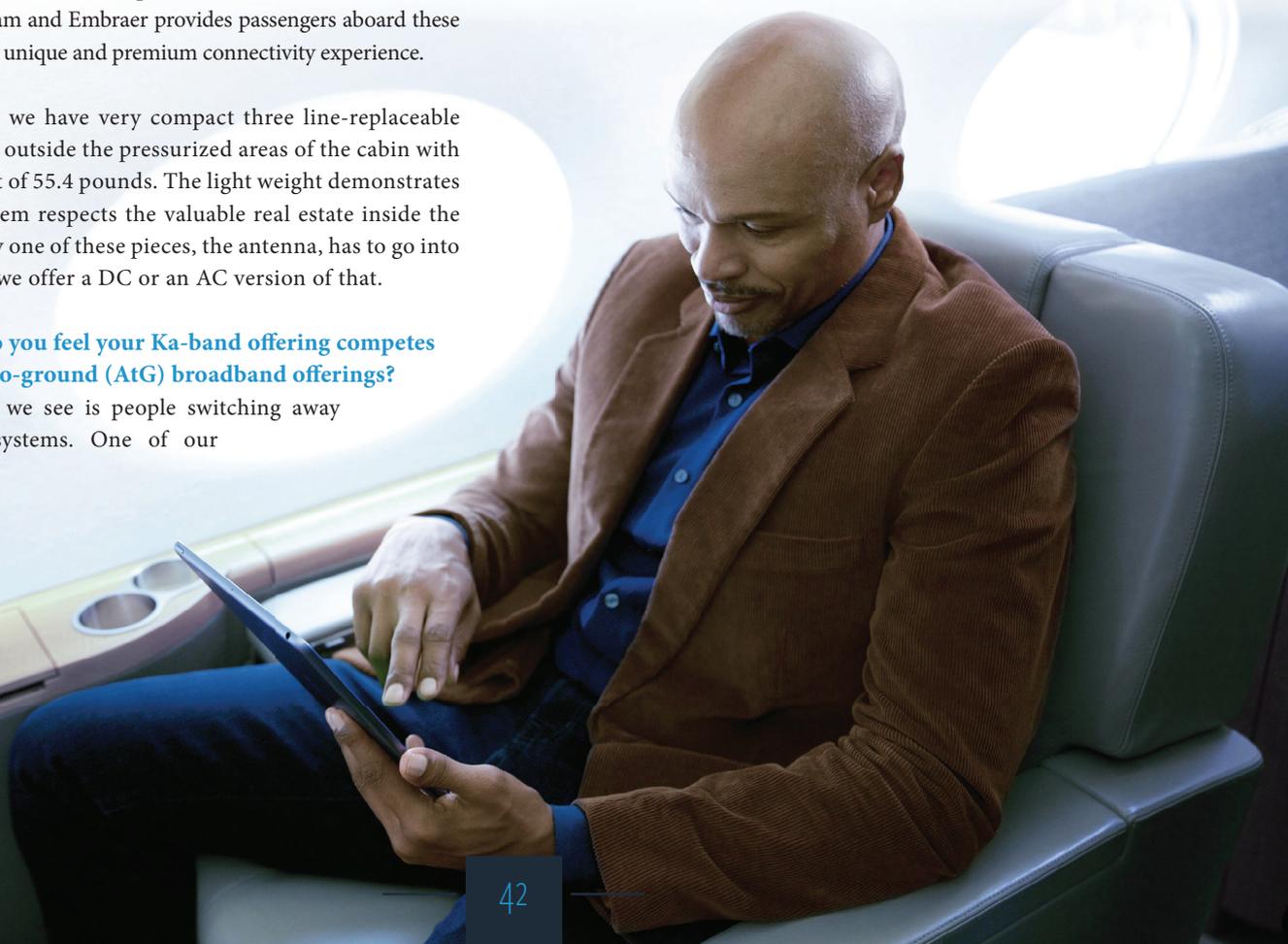
customers, for example, has a fleet of G280s and they are switching to our connectivity solution from AtG in order to take advantage of the vast increase in bandwidth we offer. Additionally, our users are able to connect as soon as they step into the aircraft since our connectivity solution is active through all phases of flight. In fact, about 30% of the usage we see is from jets that have yet to take off or that have landed. Executives want to continue their conference calls or respond to emails, and you can't do that on the ground with an AtG system.

AH: How has Viasat done through the lockdown period?

JP: Our first-quarter results for 2020 were very good and beat analysts' expectations. Our fiscal year ended in March and we had a record annual turnover of some \$2.3 billion. Since the pandemic hit, our commercial side has been impacted, of course, but business aviation has continued to be strong.

Designing, building, launching, insuring and operating satellites is a very capital intensive business. However, once they are up you can serve a wide range of customers and they operable for 15 to 20 years which creates a consistent revenue stream. So, we are able to use the cash flows from our ViaSat-1 and ViaSat-2 configurations to fund ViaSat-3.

All in all, we are very optimistic about the future and uncapping our Ka-band speeds underlines the unrivaled capacity that we bring to the market. [|BAM](#)





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WESTERNJET AVIATION



NAVIGATING THROUGH THE STORM

Jim Hansen, Founder and CEO of Western Jet Aviation,
on the global pandemic and the uncertain recovery

Q : Jim, before we look at the impact of COVID on WJA and the industry in general, can you just refresh us on the history of WJA?

JH: It all goes back to December 1972 when I'd graduated from the Northrop Institute of Technology, which is right near LAX in Los Angeles. I joined a small MRO outfit at Van Nuys Airport doing maintenance on light and mid-sized twin-engine aircraft.

That led to me gradually working my way up to Gulfstream G2s and I had a fair bit of experience working on G2s and G3s. Then the company I was working for went into their fifth or sixth buyout and I decided the time had come to fulfil a long-standing ambition of mine to go out on my own.

I always worked to develop and maintain a great relationship with the aircraft owners whose planes I was working on. So, fortunately for me, when I said I was setting up on my own, a number of them came to me and said, where are you going? How can we help?

These offers of support came from across the board, from owners of small turboprops on to owners and operators of Gulfstream aircraft. That was how it all began. I scraped together or borrowed the tools I needed and from there it was all about working 18 to 20 hours a day, every day, building the client base and the company's reputation.

I have to say that I was blessed with some of the greatest customers you could find. They knew we had a limited staff in those early days and I was always very clear about what we could and could not do. If something was going to take five days, I'd tell them that and I wouldn't try to do it in four. But I wouldn't take six days on it either.

They knew I was being honest with them and throughout the 21 years we have now been in business, we have been pretty much on time and on budget 99 percent of the time. That is what customers look for and respect in this industry.





“ Throughout the 21 years we have now been in business, we have been pretty much on time and on budget 99 percent of the time. That is what customers look for and respect in this industry.”

“As timing would have it, we were appointed an Aviation Clean Air (ACA) dealer just prior to COVID so we implemented protocols to sanitize all aircraft with ACA’s portable ionizers upon arrival and again upon departure to protect our staff as well as customers. We’ve been busy quoting ACA’s interior purification system installations as well.”



Q: Pretty much the whole industry had a great year in 2019, following on from another really good year in 2018. Then, in March 2020, the pandemic struck. What impact did it have on WJA?

JH: Well, we managed to stay open the whole time, which was really important. We got everyone masked-up and instituted social distancing. All our internal and external meetings were with everyone six feet apart or more from everyone else. As timing would have it, we were appointed an Aviation Clean Air (ACA) dealer just prior to COVID so we implemented protocols to sanitize all aircraft with ACA’s portable ionizers upon arrival and again upon departure to protect our staff as well as customers. We’ve been busy quoting ACA’s interior purification system installations as well.

Fortunately, our revenue held up well. We had a lot of customers wanting to use the downtime to bring forward maintenance or upgrade events. We had to schedule them, of course, so not everyone brought their aircraft in at the same time. But we had a steady flow throughout the first three months of COVID and it went very well.

Our safety precautions worked and, so far, we have not had any COVID related illnesses, and we are still all doing our part to stay safe with masks and social distancing. We’re now seeing some worrying signs out there in the wider economy, of the pandemic moving to a second wave. But things have not yet fully opened up in our State, anyway.

The restaurants are still only open for outdoor eating and we have many things, including sporting events, that are still locked down. However, when this first started the 405 Freeway was empty of cars. Now the traffic is back. It’s a puzzle to me where the folks are all going, with so much still closed, but it is definitely getting busy again.

Q: How do you see things progressing?

JH: Well, we keep hearing that cases are going down and

the hospitals are not as full. However, it seems to me that the real financial hit from the pandemic is continuing and is posing a real threat. Mom and pop businesses are closing down all around the place and big brands are shedding jobs. We see some well-known brands here in the US say they are shutting their doors for good. None of that is encouraging.

Q: What are you seeing on the charter front?

JH: We are already seeing a strong uptick from the charter companies that we deal with. They all say that charter prices are holding up well and there is growing demand. However, what they add is that they are doing many more point to point trips, rather than round trips. I don’t really understand why that is, since it stands to reason that folks have to get back again, but maybe everyone is trying to secure the best prices.

Clearly, it is going to take a long time, years perhaps, before commercial airlines are back at the same level of business that they enjoyed pre-COVID. Winning back public trust and getting people confident that they can be safe in a crowded commercial flight is going to be a tough ask for the airlines.

Q: If business aviation is going to take a further hit from the pandemic further down the line, when do you think it is likely to come?

JH: The downturn in business aviation generally lags behind a recession so it is hard to say. It may be that people will opt to hang onto aircraft for longer. But what we are actually seeing goes in the other direction. People who are putting their aircraft up for sale are doing so in order to upgrade to something newer and / or with a longer range.

The point is, we are seeing a really good time right now. How long it will last is the 64,000 dollar question, but we can’t worry about that. We’re holding steady and looking good, thanks to our loyal customer base. [BAM](#)

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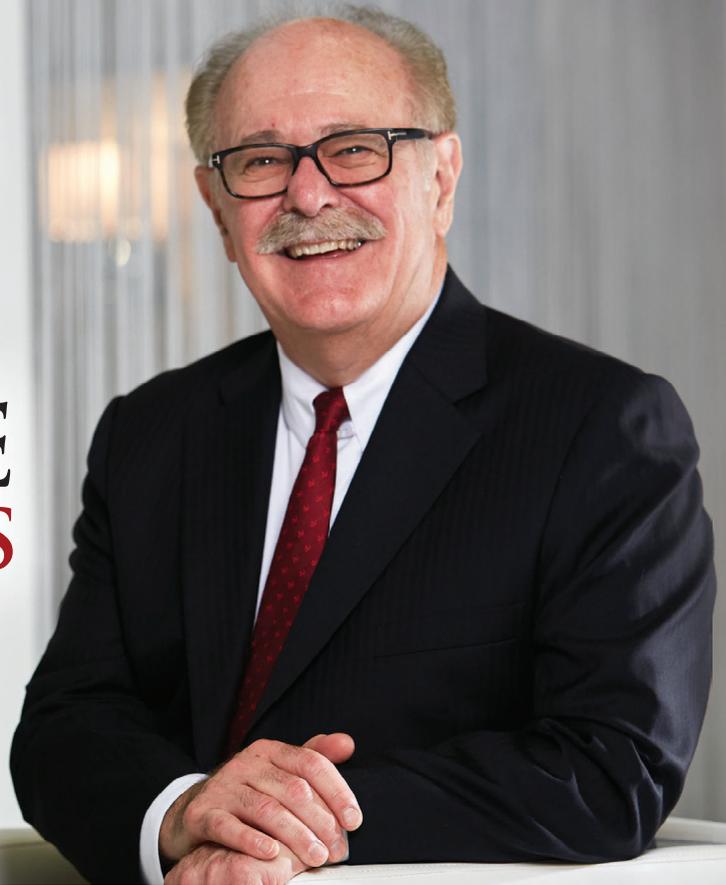
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“Current prices have turned out to be higher than analysts forecasted just months ago. In fact, U.S. crude oil stocks decreased by nearly 20 million barrels from the end of July to mid-August, and continue to trend down.”

OIL PRICE DISTURBANCES

Craig Sincock, President and CEO at Avfuel, talks to BAM about the pandemic and its impact on the demand for fuel



Q: What has the pandemic meant for Avfuel and your customers?

CS: At the onset of the pandemic, we saw oil supply far outpace that of demand. This led to a dramatic drop in oil prices—April’s lows of just \$18/barrel for Brent crude oil were in stark contrast to January’s average of \$64/barrel. The drop was rapid, but we’ve since begun to recover as July saw an average of \$43/barrel—more on par with March’s market level.

Current prices have turned out to be higher than analysts forecasted just months ago. In fact, U.S. crude oil stocks decreased by nearly 20 million barrels from the end of July to mid-August, and continue to trend down. Since the end of June, demand has increased at a greater rate than supply.

While 2020 as a whole is on track to see a decline in production and an even larger decline in demand—perhaps averaging just \$41/barrel, according to the EIA—we believe that fundamentals will continue to revert to their normal levels into next year, with hopes of a vaccine that will further accelerate the recovery of global demand and the markets.

In 2021, analysts see a rebound in demand and a decline in inventories, with fuel prices averaging \$50/barrel. Avfuel tends to

agree with these assessments, but there is still much volatility in any projection as we continue to monitor the global health crisis.

When we look at jet fuel, specifically, fluctuating market demand from commercial aviation has certainly affected business aviation costs across the market. Commercial aviation is the largest driver of jet fuel demand, so when demand decreases, so do jet fuel prices. And with a decline in fuel volume, airports and FBOs turn to other services to recoup lost profits, like ramp fees or handling fees. We’ve also seen an increase in flowage and storage fees as a direct result of decreased airport fuel volume. These costs are often passed down to the bizav end user in some way or another.

Q: How do you see the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2020 playing out, and what are your expectations for the first half of 2021?

CS: From the initial shock of the pandemic, fuel demand from airlines took a sharp decline—they are currently running at a 40 – 50% level year over year, and I predict their recovery will take two to three years.

In the same time period, we saw large cargo operators—those that handle trips across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans—have an almost immediate increase in demand: even doubled in

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“Our Avtank division assisted with local PPE shortages, creating face mask ear hooks and face shield headbands.”

some cases. This is mostly because so much cargo is carried in the belly freight of aircraft that aren't flying, so these large cargo operators have been a replacement in the “lift”. As such, that part of our business increased significantly.

Military business has remained about the same year over year, and is actually trending slightly up.

And of course, business jets—as people are aware—had an initial drop because of the pandemic, but quickly came back. Business jets seem to be at an 80%-85% level in comparison to 2019 levels.

Our forecast is that the above segments will remain approximately at the same level throughout the end of the year. The industry may move up a step when vaccines are

more eminent and there are more therapeutics for the virus—that should give us a little more lift. On other hand, to get back to 2019 levels, the final step will be a global economic recovery—it may take a year or two to get the entire industry there, but it's hard to say exactly how long.

Q: Looking at Avfuel itself, what has been the effect so far of Covid, and how have you responded?

CS: For Avfuel operations specifically, we adapted our operations to maintain business continuity while ensuring the health and safety of our employees—this meant transitioning the majority of our staff to alternative work locations. As restrictions lift, we're implementing a return-to-office plan that is executed in phases and allows for fluidity as the situation changes.

Of course, we saw early on in the pandemic a hard hit to demand. This actually made it easier to source fuel and the hauler to transport it. Then, as demand started to pick up and refineries weren't running at full capacity, timing of the supply chain became more critical. But that's where we shine—handling the logistics to get people fuel where and when they need it.

We also adapted our offerings to best serve our customers' needs in a volatile landscape:

- To stay connected, we created the Avfuel Virtual Meetup series—a webinar series with our branded locations to provide helpful insights as if we were chatting at a convention.
- Our quality assurance team collaborated with industry organizations on resources for reduced operations and decommissioning fuel equipment.
- Our Avtank division assisted with local PPE shortages, creating face mask ear hooks and face shield headbands.



- We waived fees for our online FAA-Approved Part 139 Fuel Safety training for Avfuel customers to soften training expenses and to encourage online training while face-to-face is unavailable.
- We provided our customers with a constant flow of communications filled with helpful resources to make certain they didn't miss critical information. These resources are compiled at Avfuel.com/COVID19.
- To support a healthier environment, we spent more time focusing on our carbon offset program, sustainable aviation fuel initiatives, and book and claim modeling for distribution of sustainable fuels.

Q: Let's go back pre the lockdown period and look at how 2020 started for Avfuel and what the progress has been in extending the brand?

CS: As of August 24, 2020, we are proud to have welcomed 22 new branded FBOs into the Avfuel Network, including operations like DFW Airport, Avflight Grand Rapids, ProJet Aviation and MRB Aviation. Avfuel employs a dedicated, professional team of sales personnel, and the staff to support their efforts, who have worked tirelessly all year to connect with prospects, develop relationships, identify needs and find solutions to support them. Often, a new

or renewed partnership comes about because of relationship development. People want to do business with people they like and people they can rely on. With consideration for the pandemic, that relationship development process looked a little different, but we got creative with ways to connect, including video calls and webinars.

As I've told our customers, challenging times are built for leaders. We are certainly making our way through the definition of challenging times. While no one truly knows the outcome of the challenge we're facing for certain, we've been working with customers on how to survive for the short term and position for the future.

In the short-term, I think it's crucial to identify your natural leaders, make sure they're empowered, make sure they collaborate, and make sure they have the flexibility to adapt to the volatility of the situation. Then, it's important to find your next generation of leaders—these are the people who will see your organization through the next emergency down the road—it's important to always be working on succession.

Finally, looking at the long-term, know that business will return. But anticipate that the world will change because of this challenge; we advise building your organization to the new evolving environment, not just rebuilding it to the old one. Those who do so will thrive again. |BAM

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ONE-STOP-SHOP



AH: Greg, how did you get started in the industry and what was the route to your current position, heading up Elliott Aviation?

GS: I started out in Columbus, Ohio as an avionics installation technician and worked my way up to site leader for a company called Electrosonics. It was an avionics only shop that was later acquired by Garrett (GE). After leading that site for two years and doing some direct sales, they asked if I would move to a sales role, selling avionics and eventually maintenance, engine overhauls, paint, and interior work as a Regional Sales Representative.

Greg Sahr, President and CEO of Elliott Aviation, talks to Anthony Harrington about running a one-stop-shop for jets

I was promoted to a Sales Director role covering the central and western US and moved to Dallas for five years. Then, in 2011, Elliott recruited me as their VP of sales and marketing and business development. I was excited to be part of a well-respected business aviation MRO. In May of 2013 our company CEO, Wynn Elliott, asked me to become president.

Over the next couple of years, I had a unique opportunity to completely rebuild the senior leadership team as we continued to grow the business. At the end of January 2020,





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our owner retired and we had a new financial partner, Summit Park, a private equity firm out of North Carolina. We're looking forward to having a capital partner that can help us focus on company growth.

AH: What are the main strengths of the company?

GS: On the MRO side, we consider ourselves to be a one-stop-shop for business aviation, taking care of all that an aircraft needs to stay airworthy. This includes maintenance, avionics, paint, interior, accessories, and parts. We have FBOs at all three of our locations, and we have an aftermarket avionics parts sales business that is a spin-off of our success in avionics upgrades. We have also started manufacturing a brand of LED lighting called Prizm cabin lighting, which is sold to other MROs under the Elliott Technologies brand.

AH: How did the opportunity to move into LED lighting come about?

GS: Essentially, our business development team saw a need in the market which emerged from our experience installing competing products on interior refurbishments on a range of business jets. The products available on the market did not seem to us to be satisfactory. They just were not up to the level of quality we wanted to provide our customers. So, we decided to take on the challenge of developing a better-quality LED product.

AH: Does Elliott work across a wide range of aircraft models or do you specialise?

GS: We have a pretty diverse offering. Our company was a Beechcraft dealer since 1947, so our history and foundation is rooted in Beechcraft products. Today, we remain an authorized service facility for Hawker, Beechjet 400A/Hawker 400XP, Premier, and King Air. We're also an authorized service center for Phenom 100/300, Legacy 450/500, and TBM. We are also an FAA and EASA 145 repair station for most Citations, Challenger 300/604/605, and Lear 45/60.

AH: How important is your paint shop to the business?

GS: We have an exceptional reputation in the industry for the quality of our aircraft paint jobs. We have a state-of-the-art facility, with a complete downdraft booth. We've even painted aircraft for many major OEMs. At times we have even had green aircraft into the facility. So, we have the respect of the industry and a well-deserved reputation.

AH: How tough has the MRO business been during the pandemic?

GS: We were very fortunate in that we rolled into the slowdown caused by the COVID crisis with a tremendous backlog of work, so we did not see much of a fall-off in demand until very recently. On top of this, we have a tremendous sales team that has continued to win business to

“The products available on the market did not seem to us to be satisfactory. They just were not up to the level of quality we wanted to provide our customers. So, we decided to take on the challenge of developing a better-quality LED product.”





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fill in any gaps caused by completed and delivered projects. However, we expect to see some slowing down over the next few months.

Typically, on the interior side of the business, we would expect to see a decline in demand during any significant economic downturn. It is something of a discretionary spend, or at least something that owners can choose to defer. However, we currently have a backlog in paint and interior. Clearly, aircraft operators who found they weren't able to fly as much with COVID restrictions are taking advantage of the downtime to upgrade and enhance their aircraft.

AH: How do you feel about the future?

GS: As a business, we've built some really great programs like our Garmin retrofit programs and the partnerships we've built with companies like Embraer, Textron, and Daher. Outside of our MRO, we have a lot of hangarage at our Des Moines and Minneapolis locations where we have great tenants. Fuel sales continue to be a good business, which helps support MRO. Although demand has fallen throughout the pandemic, we see signs that it is starting to recover. That is also a lead indicator for the overall health of business aviation, so that is encouraging.

AH: So you are seeing flight hours picking up?

GS: Yes, but probably not as quickly as we would like. However, things are heading in the right direction.

AH: What about the avionics side?

GS: We have a tremendous reputation and a very strong team in avionics. We are Garmin's number one retrofit dealer in the world, and we have held that title for many years.

Our strengths have been in fitting G1000 and G1000 NXi systems into King Airs and G5000s into Beechjet and Citation Excel/XLS. We are also the leader at installing Pro Line 21 modernization packages for Hawkers, King Airs, and Premier I/IA. We average one a month on those models.

AH: So all in all, you have come through the pandemic pretty well and are feeling optimistic about the year ahead?

GS: The team has done an exceptional job through the COVID crisis, with all the social distancing and cleaning of surfaces, and all the things that are necessary to keep our employees and customers safe. We have been very fortunate, but this has also been as a result of excellent execution on our plan. I am very proud of the team and am looking forward to the future. **|BAM**

“We have a tremendous reputation and a very strong team in avionics. We are Garmin's number one retrofit dealer in the world, and we have held that title for many years.**”**



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“I was honoured to be named “Woman of the Year” by the Asian Business Aviation Association (AsBAA) in 2016. The night of the award ceremony was particularly memorable because HKBAC was also named “Best FBO” by AsBAA, an accolade celebrating our can-do team spirit.”

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

Madonna W. Y. Fung, General Manager, Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC), talks to BAM about developing a world-class VIP hub

Q : Can you take us through the history of HKBAC?

MF: Given Hong Kong’s advantageous geographical location and reputation as a vibrant metropolis, it has long enjoyed being an Asian aviation hub. But before the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) commenced operations in Chek Lap Kok, the city did not have any FBO dedicated to business aviation.

Our VIP and business travelers had to transit through terminals packed with leisure travelers. The situation changed with the inception of the Hong Kong Business Aviation Centre (HKBAC) in 1998. The four major shareholders of HKBAC – Sun Hung Kai Properties, the Kadoorie Group, China Southern Airlines and Signature Flight Support – saw the market potential and grasped the opportunity to invest in and develop the business aviation sector in Hong Kong. This was over 20 years ago and the result was Hong Kong’s first FBO.

With HKBAC’s shareholder mix (which included a premium hospitality service provider and a property development expert), HKBAC has been able to offer its clients a unique and comprehensive experience from day one. It is well-recognised for its top-notch services, which are always provided to the highest international safety standards.

It was amazing seeing how the business aviation community has grown over the past two decades: our hangars increased from one to three over that period. Hangar 1 opened in 1998 while hangar 2 and 3 opened in 2007 and 2012 respectively, totalling close to 12,000m². Our apron expanded from 2,700m² to 50,000m² -- an area equivalent to 7 standard football pitches.

Business aviation now covers more cities than commercial aviation. From a few hundred flights a year back in 1998, HKBAC has grown to serve an annual peak total of nearly nine thousand flights in recent years, with the majority of these being business flights.

We are grateful that HKBAC's hard work has led to widespread recognition of our world-class technical support and customer service, and has won us awards and accreditations such as the IS-BAH Stage I & II certifications in 2018 and 2019 respectively. We were voted 'Best Asian FBO' by Pro Pilot's PRASE Survey for 13 consecutive years, as well as awards from the Asian Business Aviation Association (AsBAA).

We recognise that we cannot afford to be complacent and have continued to explore opportunities such as those arising from the Greater Bay Area. As a premier FBO with world-class services and facilities, we are proud of what we offer - safe, seamless professional business aviation services in style.

Q: Can you tell us how you became the General Manager?

MF: I joined HKBAC when it was first established in 1998 as the first Customer Service Manager of HKBAC. At the very beginning, we started as a FBO at the HKIA with less than 10 staff members operating from a container-turned-office. I was one of the original team members and we had just one jet to manage, namely Sir Michael Kadoorie's jet. I remembered all of us working assiduously in our "container office" to deliver personalized service round the clock to the highest safety standards.



Today, we are a team of 140 staff members and we continue to be uncompromising when it comes to the highest possible standards in what we do. As the General Manager, I work directly with the Executive Committee in monitoring both local and international business aviation development trends. I have oversight of HKBAC's management, operations, and marketing.

I was honoured to be named "Woman of the Year" by the Asian Business Aviation Association (AsBAA) in 2016. The

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night of the award ceremony was particularly memorable because HKBAC was also named “Best FBO” by AsBAA, an accolade celebrating our can-do team spirit.

Q: What are the challenges with managing an FBO in Hong Kong under normal conditions?

MF: Business aviation is increasingly the high value part of the aviation service chain, capable of bringing wider economic benefits to the general economy. In Hong Kong, business aviation works in parallel with scheduled commercial flights, providing flexibility to local and international corporate leaders & executives. It is a great complement to scheduled business or first-class commercial flights. A survey we commissioned in 2017 showed that at least 65 of the top 100 Hong Kong listed companies in Hong Kong utilise business aviation.

In recent years, we have seen increasing competition from neighboring countries and cities such as Singapore, Bangkok, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Macao, while Hong Kong’s infrastructural expansion is constrained by limited land supply. The generous government support for some FBOs also means that the challenges we face in business aviation development are substantial.

With Hong Kong’s established international outlook, language and talents, renowned service standards, and efficiency, we are confident we fare well as far as the competition is concerned. The Outline development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA Plan) has pledged support for Hong Kong to consolidate and enhance its position as an international aviation hub.

Our close connection with other Greater Bay Area (GBA) cities’ airports should enable us to form a world class airport cluster in a strategic manner.

Our shortage in land has also led to challenges such as that related to runway slots, parking capacity and storage facility. But, with innovative thinking and flexible arrangements, we have managed to optimise runway slots to accommodate business aviation as well and redesign our parking modus.

Q: COVID related restrictions are clearly going to be a problem for some time to come. How do you see things developing from here?

MF: Despite the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on international travel and aviation, the fundamentals of aviation in Hong Kong remain favourable. In fact, in challenging times like this, owners’ and chartered flights provide passengers with greater safety, confidence, and flexibility. The passenger capacity on private jets is limited, and there is a private cabin on board each flight. Tailored/stepped-up cleansing including thorough in-cabin disinfection can be performed for chartered flights after every landing, giving users more confidence in the face of current public health hazards.

On the ground, HKBAC has been well-prepared and is committed to ensuring the highest standards in regard to cleaning and hygiene in every possible respect. During this period of time, HKBAC have focused on enhancing our facilities to create the best possible experience for our guests in response to customer feedback. Our recent facility upgrade includes the installation of partitions in the passenger lounge which helps to create a better sense of privacy and comfort for our visitors. **BAM**



HKBAC revamped passenger lounge

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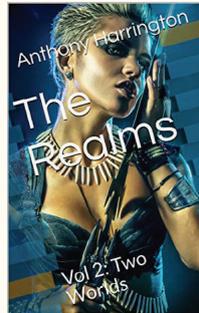
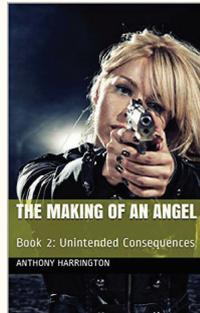
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INNOVATING THE FUTURE

Neil Boehm, Chief Technology Officer and VP of Engineering at Gentex, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's game-changing innovations for business aviation

AH: Gentex is well known to both Boeing and Airbus for its electronically dimmable windows and other technologies. Some of these have gone into VVIP airliner conversions. How much progress are you making getting this product adopted by business aviation OEMs?

NB: There is a good deal of interest in this dimmable window technology among business aviation OEMs. However, there are some technical challenges that we have had to work on solving and we now have these problems solved.

The difficulty we faced was that to make the window electronically dimmable, you have an electrochromic layer sealed between two panes of glass. This allows a passenger to use an electronic, finger-touch slider control under the window to move the transparency of the aircraft window from completely clear to completely dark.

However, while a large airliner like a Boeing 787 is tall enough, floor to ceiling, for the window glass to be completely flat, business aviation jets – even the large cabin models – have windows that are somewhat curved. The problem with curved glass is that it tends to produce variations in the electrochromic darkening and we had to work hard to find technical solutions to this problem.

We solved the issue, however, and at NBAA 2019 we had a dimmable curved glass demonstrator on display, which attracted a lot of attention. Now, with the pandemic crisis, of course, those kinds of opportunities have vanished. With the travel restrictions even face to face meetings can be difficult. This has slowed down discussions but we are getting interest from business jet OEMs.

The good thing about this industry is that people buying private jets have the spending power to support purchases, despite the pandemic. We are excited about the opportunities.

AH: You have a number of other technologies that you have developed. Can you see these making their way into business aviation?

NB: Definitely, though our initial conversations are very



“The difficulty we faced was that to make the window electronically dimmable, you have an electrochromic layer sealed between two panes of glass. This allows a passenger to use an electronic, finger-touch slider control under the window to move the transparency of the aircraft window from completely clear to completely dark.”

much with commercial airlines. We are working on some new sensor technology which has applications in multiple market sectors, from automotive to aerospace.

Our multi-sensing technology can detect a range of chemicals and gasses, as well as measure air quality, all of which is important in aviation, either for passenger comfort or for the security of the passengers, the aircraft and the airline or operator. For example, the passive sensors can detect explosives, if someone were trying to bring a bomb onboard an aircraft. They can also detect smoke or noxious chemicals.

We also have a great deal of experience with combining lighting and sensor technologies. So, for example, we can offer an airline or a VVIP business jet owner dimmable lighting. We use machine vision along with an algorithm that processes movement, to control the lighting in the aircraft. This means that when the aircraft lights are dimmed at night so the passengers can rest or sleep, the lighting system can ‘follow’ a steward or stewardess as they bring refreshments to a particular passenger seat, lighting their way instead of flooding the whole aircraft with light. It puts the lighting where it needs to be.

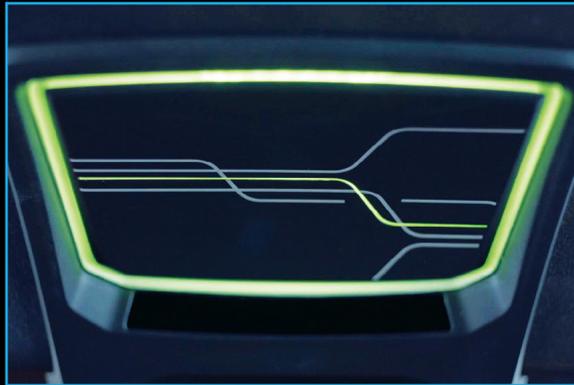
Another product that both the automotive and the aerospace sector is very interested in is our biometric scanner. This uses an iris-based ID system to identify passengers or, in the automotive sector, the driver or owner of the vehicle.

This started off as a personal validation system in the automotive sector, so we could identify who was in the driver’s seat, to provide a very high level of security. We have adapted it since then to provide the airlines with a passenger identification checking system.

The great thing about it, from a business aviation standpoint, is that you can associate user profiles with the iris-based system. This means that if the aircraft has several VIPs using the aircraft, the cabin, security, entertainment and other systems could be tailored automatically to the user.

AH: I was particularly taken with Gentex’s treatment of the rearview mirror for the automobile sector, where you turn the mirror into a display screen that shows the rear view even if the car’s rear window is blocked. How do you do that and does it have any relevance for business aviation?

NB: This is what we call our ‘smart glass’ technology. We can have a display behind the mirror so that you can opt with a single



touch to have either a mirror or a display. With the rearview mirror, we use camera technology to place a real-time image of the view behind the car onto the screen.

With a business jet, we can have a vanity mirror which, again at a touch, can turn into a display screen showing anything from a movie to a moving map of the jet's passage. We are seeing a lot of interest in that technology.

AH: Can you tell us something of your own career in Gentex?

NB: Certainly. I have been with the company for twenty years. I started as an electrical engineer and have been through various positions here. I moved into sales and from

there into a leadership position. We have a lot of great tech in the company and I love figuring out technical problems.

We have around 5,800 employees, with probably 5,600 of these being at our West Michigan location. My team is all on the development side and consists of about 400 people, of which 85 percent are engineers, scientists and physicists working in thin-film coatings.

We synthesize all our own chemistry here and we are very vertically integrated as a company. We do all the software inhouse as well, plus all the hardware and the validation testing. We are particularly strong in chemicals and coatings. It is a very unique grouping of talents. [BAM](#)



“With a business jet, we can have a vanity mirror which, again at a touch, can turn into a display screen showing anything from a movie to a moving map of the jet's passage. We are seeing a lot of interest in that technology.”

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“ I joined Pro Star in October 2018 as General Manager with a brief to bring my experience in creating and maintaining the processes and procedures a top flight aviation company needs to ensure the highest standards of service and safety, along with consistency in maintaining customer satisfaction.”



STEADY AS SHE GOES

Sean Peterson, General Manager of Pro Star Aviation, talks about his company's early years and its ambitions post-COVID

Q : Sean, can you tell us about Pro Star's history?
SP: The Pro Star story begins with an avionics maintenance specialist shop called Stead, at Manchester Airport, New Hampshire. Stead was sold to Wiggins Aerospace, probably back in the mid-1990s. Wiggins was in the freight haulage business and had little experience with corporate aviation requirements and the high levels of personal service and relationship-building that the sector requires.

Kevin Harriman, Pro Star's managing partner, together with two colleagues, Paul Taylor and Bernd Munzenmayer, a gentlemen they all referred to simply as Munz, all worked for Wiggins. They went to an NBAA Conference in 1997 and decided to branch out on their own since they felt that Wiggins' inexperience with corporate aviation was in danger of losing the entire client base that Munz had built up.

They began looking for an investor partner that would help them build a new company entirely focused on customer

satisfaction along with a high level of employee involvement and participation. All three left Wiggins and bought an entire avionics shop from a gentleman who ran an outfit in Vermont. They moved all equipment from Vermont down to Paul Taylor's garage in Pembroke, New Hampshire, and began hiring some key staff.

Rich Leighton joined them as part of the management team. Mike Touchette came on board to head up the engineering and design side. Jeff Shaw joined as Chief Inspector and wrote the new company's repair station manual. Don Fleurant came on as a production manager. Wayne Nickerson joined to manage structural support, and Kurt Kitner joined as an avionics installer.

Everything at that early stage was completed out of Paul's basement, and the team went to wherever the client's aircraft was based to do the work. They generated quotes, created engineering drawings, and went out and performed aircraft avionics installations.

The team soon started looking around for a hangar to make their base. They found a suitable facility at Manchester-Boston Regional Airport. This was purchased through a third party and is still one of the only privately owned pieces of property at the Manchester-Boston Regional (MHT) airport.

They started the company as a DBA on April 23, 1998 under Northeast Air, out of Portland Maine, and partnered with a gentleman named Henry Laughlin, who was their prime investor, but who also owned Northeast Air, which had a Part 145 repair station. The company worked under that certificate until Pro Star obtained its own repair station certificate on September 2, 1998. As soon as they had the certificate, they formally launched their company as Pro Star Aviation, LLC.

Q: That's a great story and is typical of the gutsy way so many companies in this industry have started out. What was your own route to becoming General Manager of Pro Star?

SP: Well, the need for a general manager came about fairly gradually. The guys carried out some 50 STCs over the period from September 1998 to July of 2012. At that point, Pro Star became an ODA, and we took on the process of certifying STCs locally vs using the Boston ACO; we were able to execute projects on our own.



Over the years, the company built up some excellent relationships with Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies. It grew from having between eight and ten employees to the point where we now have 75 employees, based out of two hangars at Manchester-Boston Regional Airport.

I joined Pro Star in October 2018 as General Manager with a brief to bring my experience in creating and maintaining the processes and procedures a top flight aviation company



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needs to ensure the highest standards of service and safety, along with consistency in maintaining customer satisfaction.

Q: What was your own experience before this?

SP: I have been in aviation since 1996, when I joined the industry as a 19-year-old mechanic's apprentice with Bombardier Aerospace in Connecticut.

I'd started out going to an A&P school which closed that same year. Bombardier made me an offer, and I joined what was then their new modifications team. The job was all about avionics, plus wiring and equipment installations. I was working on modifications as well, which was all about adding elements to attach racks and antennae.

I did that for several years before I was promoted to an avionics line position that involved doing inspections and troubleshooting on a range of Lear Jets, from Lear 24s to 45s. I was always hungry to learn so I'd get my hands into anything that was going. Through this work experience, I was able to obtain my Airframe and Powerplant license through work experience under Part 65.

I worked for Bombardier from 1996 to 2004 in a variety of roles, and ended up as a scheduling analyst, building work packages to encompass all the activities involved in maintenance and modifications cycles. In 2004 I left Bombardier and went to work for Embraer, starting in their Nashville Tennessee Commercial MRO doing the heavy check planning for Embraer's E-Jet line, the E190s and E170s. I planned all the heavy C-checks and Mod lines for operators such as JetBlue, Chautauqua, and Shuttle America to name a few.

By 2011 I was at Embraer's Windsor Locks, Connecticut site as General Manager for Embraer's service center at Bradley International Airport. I held that position until I joined Pro Star in October 2018.

I'd reached out to Kevin Harriman in April that year, looking to see if the opportunity aligned with my skill set. They made me an offer in August after several interviews with Kevin, plus meetings with the team. I started here in October, after I'd made sure that everything was in good order at Embraer before I left.

Q: What was it that Pro Star was looking for in creating the general manager position?

SP: Pro Star had been a smallish, privately-held company since it started. There were not a lot of the procedures in place that you would see in a big company like Embraer or Bombardier. So, after I arrived a big focus for me was on developing the procedures and processes that meant that work packages could be readily trained for and duplicated, ensuring consistently high-quality delivery. Basically, this gave the business the tools it needed to move to the next level.

Q: Pro Star recently had the honor of hosting a campaign rally attended by President Trump. How did that go?

SP: We were selected to hold the Presidential rally in our 25,000 sq. ft. hangar located in Londonderry, NH. The event was held on August 28th. Our facility was chosen because it offered close proximity to the airfield and the ability to safely provide access in and out for the public and the press. Crucially, we were also able to park Air Force One in front of the hangar, which made Pro Star the ideal location.

“ We were selected to hold the Presidential rally in our 25,000 sq. ft. hangar located in Londonderry, NH.”



Hosting 1,500 attendees in our hangar, we staged bleachers inside, and for the approximate 2,000 attendees outside, we set up tents and a Jumbotron along the north side of the hangar.

We worked closely with local police and fire to ensure the rally went smoothly and was conducted safely in accordance with the laws and regulations. Communication and coordination between the White House Staff, Secret Service, and our leadership team was seamless.

With almost 4,000 attendees, the crowd was in great spirits, the weather was amazing and most people in attendance wore face coverings. Our employees attending the event had preferred seating in the bleachers adjacent to the podium, and we also received backstage access during the takeoff of Air Force One. We were truly honored to have been selected to host the President of the United States.

Q: You have had to manage through the pandemic. How has that been?

SP: COVID hit the industry hard when it first impacted us here in the US. We took guidance from the CDC and our local State epidemiologist. We sent all the employees who could work from home, back home. We purchased personal protection equipment for staff who needed to be in the hangars

working on aircraft, and we implemented and monitored social distancing. We are still very much involved with this and carrying our daily due diligence.

We used the PPP loan program through the SBA to cover our payroll and keep our workforce intact while we navigated this uncharted territory. I am happy to report; we have not had to make any workforce reductions to date.

Q: What are your primary areas of business?

SP: We do modifications on everything from Cessna Caravans to Boeing BBJs, basically, on anything that flies. For maintenance work under our Part 145 repair station certificate, we focus primarily on going after the Challenger 600 series in the large cabin, corporate side. We are also an authorized repair station for the Pilatus PC12 and PC24, and we service most of the Pilatus operators here in the North East. We also do inspections on King Airs and Hawker Beechcraft aircraft.

On the avionics side, we support all kinds of aircraft both with service as well as selling MSP and CASP contracts for Honeywell and Collins, respectively. We continue to have an avionics team that will go out and work on avionics on the client's site. **BAM**



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SAFE LANDING

Simon Caldecott, CEO of Piper Aircraft, talks to Anthony Harrington about the company's successful return to fortune and its new auto-land capability

Simon Caldecott was appointed President and CEO of Piper Aircraft in October 2011. One of his first initiatives was to recommit the company to the manufacturing of advanced pilot training aircraft, a move that is the backbone of the company's present success. He joined Piper in 2009, the same year that the Government of Brunei took over ownership of the company. He was VP of Operations before taking on the CEO role and the Presidency.

AH: To say that Piper has had its ups and downs would be putting it mildly. What do you make of its checkered past?

SC: Over the course of its history Piper has had just about everything possible happen to it, but what is key is that last year the company had the best year, as far as sales are concerned, in its past 20 years of selling aircraft. Most of our growth has come in the pilot training market, which has been absolutely key for us.

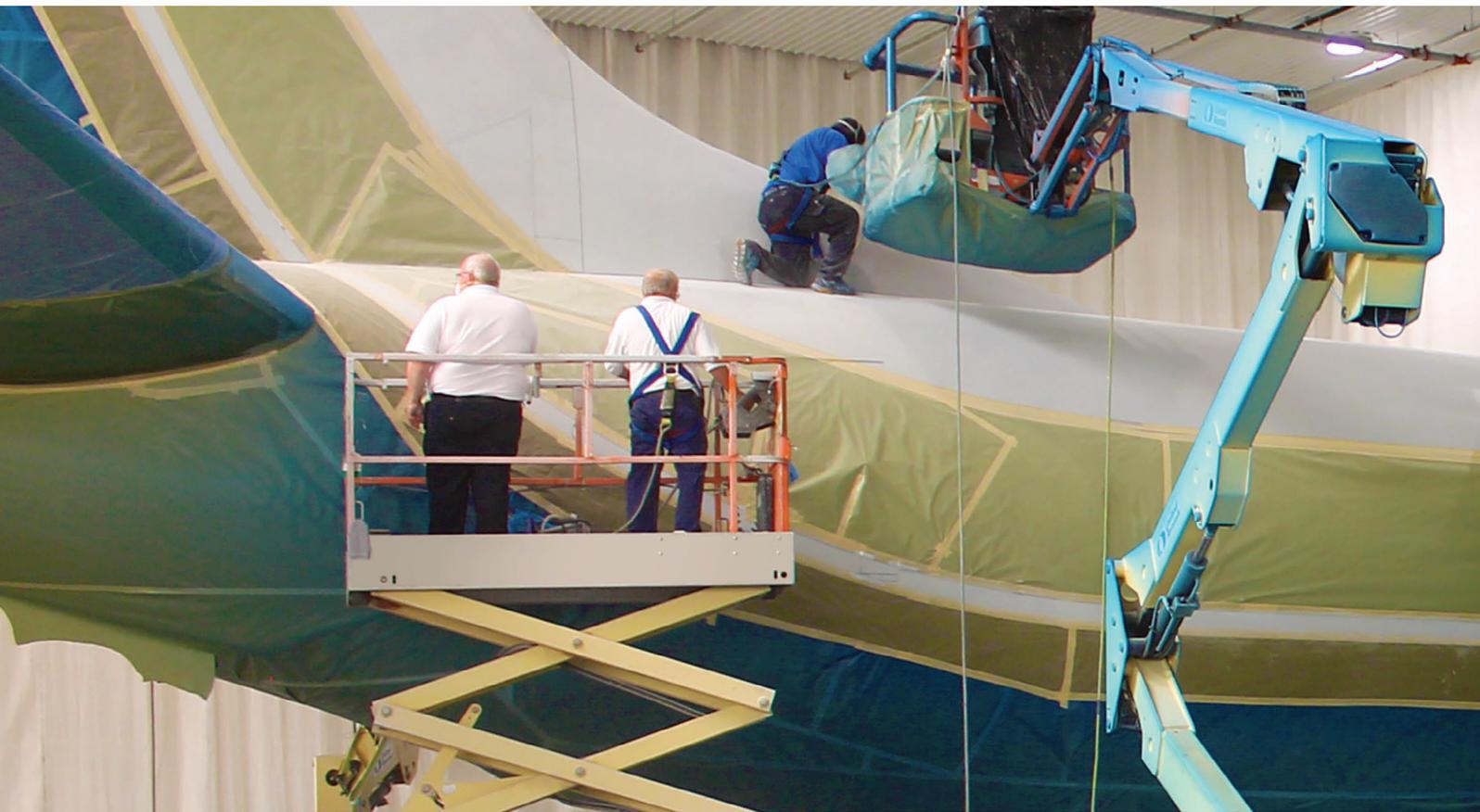
“Over the course of its history Piper has had just about everything possible happen to it, but what is key is that last year the company had the best year, as far as sales are concerned, in its past 20 years of selling aircraft.”



When I took over the CEO role in 2011, they hired me to spearhead the jet program they were working on. I shut that down in a week and then took a long look at what we could make and sell that would make us sustainable as a company. I started us on upgrading our avionics programme and working with flight schools to define what they needed. That was the vision and the path I got us started down.

Initially, we went out and surveyed a number of flight schools to find out what they felt they needed from a pilot trainer platform. We've had our Seminole trainer since it made its maiden flight in 1976. It's a very rugged aircraft and it has to be because a very wide range of people fly the aircraft and they get a lot of flying hours. What was clear was that our pilot training platform had to be safe, reliable, and affordable as a training asset.





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The Seminole has never been the Rolls Royce of twin-engine propeller aircraft, but it is a great value trainer that is very durable. What we did was to upgrade its avionics and to give it the latest glass cockpit. That was absolutely key as all aspiring commercial pilots want to train on glass cockpits these days. They know that this is what they are going to be flying once they're through their training and into their careers as pilots.

So, the key to our present success is that we have focused on markets where we have real strength and we have been very progressive in refreshing the products and keeping them up to date.

AH: Can you describe your markets?

SC: Piper has two distinct markets. To generate volume sales I had us focus first on our training platforms. However, our M-Class products, which has its foundation from the Malibu Mirage, was originally developed in the 1980s as a piston aircraft. It is a very affordable aeroplane for owner pilots and I was keen to develop this market as well. The Piper Meridian, a derivative of the Mirage, was originally developed in the late '90s and is particularly suited to owners who run small to medium-sized businesses and need to fly state to state on business.

Once again, we went out and spoke at length to the customer base and our dealer network to see how we could upgrade and enhance this platform. At the time there was opportunity for improvement. The Meridian's range was limited and it was ageing in terms of avionics and technology.

“ I told Garmin that we wanted to be the first to market with the auto-land product and they were delighted. We provided them with three different aircraft over a two-and-a-half-year period.”

We set our engineering team to look at improving the payload range and they came up with a bigger wing that enabled the plane to carry more fuel. We also updated the cockpit with the Garmin G3000 avionics suite and priced it aggressively, at a million dollars cheaper than the direct competition.

We also gave the interior a complete makeover. Our marketing team worked with a group of designers out of Boston to come up with new concepts for a business-class interior. They took inspiration from a range of automotive solutions and produced some very attractive styling, with trim panels in carbon fibre. They really stepped up the interior and the new glass cockpit was a huge improvement.

AH: You recently announced a new 'auto-land' feature, in partnership with Garmin, which can land the aircraft automatically at the nearest suitable airport if the pilot is suddenly incapacitated. That was a huge step.

SC: Absolutely. The whole concept behind auto-land was to improve the comfort, security and safety of the passengers. This has been one of the major fruits of our partnership with Garmin. They came to us about five years ago and said they were working on an auto-land feature based on a digital auto-pilot. They already had an emergency descent mode on their avionics, so all the building blocks were in place.

AH: How did that partnership go?

SC: Very well indeed. I told Garmin that we wanted to be the



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first to market with the auto-land product and they were delighted. We provided them with three different aircraft over a two-and-a-half-year period. We took a brand new aircraft off the production line for them to do all their certification testing on, and in May last year, we gave them another new aircraft and they used that one to do all their demos with the press and key industry personnel. That made for a big commitment from both companies.

The great thing about auto-land, by comparison with having a parachute on the aircraft, is that this lands the aeroplane safely on a runway. It uses the database in the navigation system to find the most suitable airport for that aircraft, taking into consideration a whole range of factors, such as runway length and width, wind direction, weather, fuel, altitude and so on.

When the emergency system activates, it transmits on the 121.5 emergency system and will tell the control tower that it is in auto-land mode, and will send an automatic squawk out from the transponder box as well. The whole thing is going down exceptionally well with the client base. When we first announced it we had clients trading in their old M600 aircraft for the new version.

AH: Are you considering retrofitting the auto-land technology into older aircraft?

SC: We are considering developing a retrofit kit for newer M600 models. It can't be included in older aircraft because they do not have the required level of avionics. All in all, it is not that cost-effective to retrofit and given the time and

expense required, our clients would be better off trading in their old aircraft for the new model.

AH: As a final point, how has the COVID pandemic affected Piper?

SC: We first felt the impact at the beginning of February. A group of us were going to the Singapore Air Show and one of my sales team was due to go to China. I cancelled both of those. By mid-March, it had escalated hugely, with President Trump imposing restrictions across the US. We started an executive task force which met daily from the beginning of March.

I am still meeting daily with the executive task force on our COVID safety measures. I put a hiring freeze in place, so we put off hiring an additional 120 people for the factory. We'll be producing probably 30 percent less aircraft this year than we had planned for, so keeping our head count down has been useful. We've had no forced layoffs or furloughs, so that has been very satisfying.

AH: What do you think of the prospects for the rest of 2020 and the first half of 2021?

SC: For us, the turboprop market has always been a steady one and I expect that to continue. Today, more than ever, people want their own aircraft to travel. I think the market for private aircraft is going to be pretty buoyant for the next couple of years. For our immediate future, our goal is to keep our team safe and healthy while continuing to manufacture the highest quality aircraft. |BAM



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