



Business in Perspective

National Jets—It's a Family Affair

By W. Stephen Dennis

National Jets, Inc. has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 1967. The Boy family originally hailed from

the Raleigh/Durham area of North Carolina.

After the war, brothers Carl and James Boy, both WWII vets, began occasionally buying and selling military planes.

The eldest, Carl Boy, had flown for the Naval Air Corps. James Boy wasn't a pilot in the war, but he eventually caught the love of flying and also became a pilot. The planes they purchased started small and gradually became larger. Before they knew it, the brothers bought an air cargo plane and worked themselves into the midst of an air cargo business, Carolina Aircraft Corporation, which is now the parent company of National Jets, Inc.

"Back from the war, my father tried his hand at a variety of businesses—a restaurant, a service station and a couple of car washes—before he got into the business of aviation," said Russ Boy Sr., Carl Boy's son and vice president of National Jets Air Center at Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport.

He said that in the forties, his father and brother bought and sold some military bombers used for hauling cargo, and eventually got into the air cargo freight business hauling meat out of La Paz, Bolivia, to the U.S.

"The runway we landed at to pick up the meat was high altitude," he said. "The B-17 we'd purchased (which had been General Eisenhower's personal B-17 during his presidency) was designed for high altitudes."

Much of Carolina Aircraft Corporation's business was in South America, and the brothers soon decided that operating their business would be much more efficient and effective from South Florida. The family uprooted and moved there.

Thomas E. Boy, the son of co-founder James Boy, is the current president of the FBO.

"We signed our leasehold with Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood Airport in 1967. That's when we opened our doors as a fixed base operator—selling fuel, parking airplanes, developing our customer base and eventually incorporating avionics and maintenance," he said. "Our company has changed so much over the years. It's hard to believe we've



National Jets' facility at Ft. Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport.

gone from cargo to corporate jets."

In 2003, that FBO came in as number one in Professional Pilot's PRASE survey.

Ft. Lauderdale International

National Jets Air Center is one of four FBOs at Ft. Lauderdale International, which is in the top five busiest airports in the nation.

"We thrive in a very competitive setting," said Russ Boy Sr. "FLL has always been a competitive field, but for our family there's always been a right and wrong way to compete; our word is our business. We care about the people that come through our FBO."

Competition is healthy—as long as there's enough business. FLL stays busy most of the year, especially November to May. Up until recently, there had only been three FBOs on the field. The addition of a fourth has made it a tight playing field.

"I'll admit that the addition of a fourth FBO hurts," said Russ Boy Sr. "We had enough competition with three FBOs. It hasn't been easy. Not being held hostage by fuel is the first obstacle an FBO must overcome, in addition to the cost of insurance; it makes for a competitive market. But we couldn't see doing anything else besides running this business. It's a huge part of our lives."

Russ Boy Sr.'s two sons, Russ Jr. and Chris, both plan on being an active part of their aviation business in the future. Russ Boy Jr. is operations manager, and Chris Boy is in line service.

Russ Boy Jr. has worked at the family business in one form or another since high school, and full time since his graduation from Florida State University in 1996, where he majored in business man-

agement.

"When I first came back to the family business after college, I started working line service, eventually became a lead line serviceman, then supervisor, and four years later, I became operations manager," he said. "I've taken on more and more responsibility over the years."

Part of his job as operations manager includes overseeing the charter department, which consists of three Lear 25s and three Lear 35s.

Other family members involved in the business include Wendy Robbin, Thomas Boy's daughter, who works from her home doing marketing, advertising and promotions, and her husband Sam Robbin, who manages the charter department.

"Sam is an exceptional addition to our family's business," said Thomas Boy. "He's instrumental in the business management and corporate functioning of the company."

Operating an independent FBO is

quality service. Some of our high-profile customers can't afford to take the risk."

Russ Boy Jr. is optimistic.

"Every year seems to bring more people," he said. "Ft. Lauderdale International Airport is growing every day. We have the Air and Sea Show every May, which draws two million people, spring break, and winter residents and tourists from around the world, as well as new carriers like Jet Blue and Spirit with cheap fares."

Flight training in the 1970s

In 1976, many Vietnam veterans—including pilots—were about to run out of benefits. The federal government responded by offering money and extended benefits to vet pilots who wanted to get their Learjet rating and continue their aviation training.

"In 1976, when pilots were in search of flight training, many FBOs began to offer ratings courses," said Thomas Boy. "We started a flight training school in order to keep up with the times. The vet pilots needed a place to train and we opened our doors."

The presence of a flight training school is bound to increase traffic and business at an FBO.

"Adding the flight school took us



One of six of National Jets' air ambulance fleet.

not all fun and family.

"It's getting even more difficult, with franchised FBOs and their networking incentives," said Russ Boy Sr.

Luckily, National Jet serves some of South Florida's major corporations and Fortune 500 companies. With loyalty so hard to find these days, and every plane vying for the cheapest gas price, the Boy family has managed to amass a great following.

"It's true that the average FBO client is extremely price conscious, and a reasonable price is always important," said Thomas Boy. "But quality is the utmost, and cheaper fuel doesn't always come with

to the next level in the business," he said. "And we were happy to help the pilots get their Lear ratings."

Aviation emergencies

National Jets is more diverse than the average FBO. In 1970, National Air Ambulance—a daughter company of National Jets on the premises of the FBO—was the first air ambulance company to be licensed in Florida.

Because of the strategic location at FLL, the company is able to conveniently and cost effectively oper-

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ate bedside to bedside, critical and non-critical, medevac flights on a moments notice. In fact, the operation has been so successful it comprises 60 percent of National Jets, Inc.'s business.

National Air Ambulance's multilingual flight coordinators stand by 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide rapid response to any situation that may call for an air ambulance flight. The company has the experience and expertise for emergency flights into Europe, Canada, the Caribbean, and South, Central and North America, operating over 600 medical evacuation flights per year.

"If a patient gets sick or has an accident in the Caribbean, we're responsible for transporting them from there to where they need to get for emergency services," said Russ Boy Sr. "If someone has a surfing accident off the coast of Costa Rica, or falls and breaks their hip on a cruise ship, we have a triage team who gets the patient moved safely."

National Air Ambulance's primary clients include flights for private individuals, major travel and insurance companies, cruise lines, the armed forces, major hospitals, transplant and physical rehabilitation facilities.

The company is fully staffed with flight medical directors, flight physicians, registered flight nurses, respiratory therapists and first response paramedics.

In addition to a fully equipped fleet of six medevac planes, National Jets has an aircraft management department run by Sam Robbin.

Because of the international client

tele that fly in and out of South Florida, the staff at National Jets is multilingual, speaking English, Spanish, French, German and Portuguese.

Eye on the future

Thomas Boy said they recently entered into a joint venture, 40-acre leasehold with Broward County for the next 18 years.

"We've kept 10 acres for Carolina Aircraft Corporation, and lease the other 30 acres to FedEx," he said. "Aside from the security of an 18-year leasehold, our forte is personality. Customers come to us for the personal treatment we give."

In a high-cost fuel market like today's, it pays for a fixed base operation to be flexible. How does a family owned and operated FBO stay ahead in this cutthroat world of general aviation?

When the fuel prices are lower, so are operating costs; that's when revenues increase. When the cost of fuel is high, operating costs rise and revenues decrease.

When fuel costs are high, FBOs make a great percentage of their profits off amenities a customer uses while visiting, such as parking, hangar space and catering.

According to Russ Boy Jr., "There are two ways we stay ahead here at National Jets Air Center; our first priority is our customers. We take our clients and their needs very seriously. The second is keeping our fuel prices down.

"Staying on the competitive edge is very important for us. Our fuel prices are cost effective and we set up customer-friendly fueling contracts for our loyal clientele. We will match our competitor's prices

if the end result is a satisfied customer."

By definition, a family business is a lot more personal. In some cases, the bigger an FBO gets the more they lose touch with that.

"For my family, meeting our customer's needs is a family legacy," Russ Boy Jr. said. "When it comes to a family business, if you don't have service, you don't have anything."

Russ Boy Jr. said that in the future, they'll be upgrading some of their charter fleet, from Lear 35s to larger and more fuel-efficient Lear 45s.

"And as far as the FBO goes, we'll just keep doing what we've done since 1970," he said. "Serving our customers is our first priority. We have an unbelievable team of support. Between family and customers, we really couldn't ask for much more."

Still, he said, as a family-owned FBO, it's hard to get "to the top of the heap." Luckily, the Boy family seems to really love what they're doing.

"We have our fingers on the pulse everyday," added Russ Boy Sr.

W. Stephen Dennis is the founder, CEO and president of Aviation Resource Group International, a leader in aviation advisory services since 1975. He has more than 25 years of varied aviation industry and executive and senior management experience covering specialized areas such as operational efficiency, profitability conversions, business development, strategic planning, marketing and corporate restructuring. He can be contacted at Steve@airportjournals.com.



Family owned and operated since 1970, National Jets was voted #1 FBO by Pro Pilot's Praise Survey in 2003.