

## Air Trek: Providing air ambulance and charter service for 36 years

BY BOB MASSEY

Florida Weekly Correspondent

At 36 years old, Air Trek is the oldest business at Punta Gorda Airport. But, oh, how it has grown.

"When we started, it was just my brother Wayne and me," said Dana Carr, co-owner and director of operations, who spoke with us for this report. "We literally had one airplane and a little office down here. It was somewhat less than mom and pop, to say the least. Wayne was actually working for another mom-and-pop company here then called Intercoastal Airways. It was a husband-and-wife team, and Wayne was one of their charter pilots/flight instructors.

They had a little flight school and they did charter and an occasional air ambulance. We acquired their business and started out on our own."

That was only a year after Dana Carr graduated Charlotte High School.

"Over the years, we provided all types of services. Early on, we had a flight school, always had an aircraft charter, did an occasional air ambulance, did everything from sea plane charter work, a little crop dusting — a little bit of everything in aviation."

After selling the flight school in the 1980s, the Carrs focused on their primary moneymaker.

"We concentrated on expanding the air ambulance market, which, at that

point, we were marketing in Fort Myers and Punta Gorda," Mr. Carr said. "We weren't really going too far. Then we began to market it statewide. The charter work came from word-of-mouth recommendations and some yellow pages ads."

### New destinations

Today, air ambulance is still 85 percent of Air Trek's business, which flies nationally and internationally — mostly to the Caribbean and Central and South America, but also to Europe and Southeast Asia.

The company now has seven aircraft, and maintains about 20 medical staff,



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Dana Carr

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PETER ARATARI / FLORIDA WEEKLY  
Wayne and Dana Carr are co-owners of Air Trek, the multi-faceted — and oldest — business operating from the Punta Gorda Airport.

## MINDING

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we had some limited success."

"About the time we really started marketing, we started getting really busy with the air ambulance. So this year, we continued our efforts and we're picking up more and more charter clients. Now the acquisition of the new Citation VII jet moves us into that level of luxury charter. That's what we're really going for."

The Citation VII is indeed a beauty. Its style is reminiscent of the old Boeing 727. Inside, its amenities include leather seats and a bar.

"It's the newest, nicest, fastest jet we've ever owned," Mr. Carr said. It definitely moves us into that ultra-luxury market."

Air Trek is truly a family affair. Owned by Dana and Wayne Carr, a third brother, Lester, joined the company as director of maintenance after retiring from the

including a medical director, Dr. Paige Kreegel, a board certified emergency physician, who started with Air Trek about 25 years ago as a flight physician until moving to the director position about 10 years ago. (Dr. Kreegel is currently running in a special election for Florida's 19th congressional district.)

With the economy in a lull, Air Trek's charter service was in a holding pattern.

"Two years ago, we talked about expanding the charter service to add a more luxury, higher-class level of air charter," Mr. Carr said. "So we started marketing charter two winters ago, and



of stories like that. It's what makes his career at Air Trek rewarding.

"Recently we were called to fly a patient out of Southwest Florida to Houston, and if we hadn't done it, the patient would have died. As a result, we got to play a part in saving that person's life."

Mr. Carr enjoys the less dramatic task of helping his charter customers get where they want to go as well. And with the acquisition of the Citation VII, they can do it in style.

"I look at this new jet as going from the post-recession recovery stage to the growth stage," he said. "We're growing the business again. We're acquiring new aircraft and moving forward." ■

**Air Trek hosted a Jan. 30 Wine, Jets and Chocolate event to announce its new offerings and to present a contribution to the Art by Kids with Cancer organization.**

Air Force.

"We've raised our kids with this business," Mr. Carr added. "We have employees who have been with us 10, 20 years. My son has done all the video of the aircraft. Wayne's son, Aaron, is our CFO, and he's also a pilot. Aaron's wife is the marketing director. It isn't just a job for us."

There are other ways in which Air Trek isn't just a job. Mr. Carr said he's most excited when the service can deliver a hospice patient back home to spend his or her last days — sometimes only hours — with family and friends.

was born without ribs. She was put into what they call a titanium rib program, and she was a frequent flyer. It was done out in Texas, and as she grew, she had to have the ribs stretched or replaced because the ribs were steel and didn't grow with her. About two or three times a year, we'd fly her out to Texas, wait on her while she had the procedure done, and then the next day we'd fly her back to Fort Myers. It was cool to see her grow up. We started when she was 5 or 6 years old, and we took her until she was a teenager.

Mr. Carr said that he has 36 years

**Encompassing mission**

And there have been times when Air Trek has saved lives — or at least enriched them.

"The real rewarding part is when you can take a child here in Florida who needs a special surgery only available in Texas or Boston, and fly that child there — and six, eight weeks later, you're called to go retrieve that child and they're a completely different child" he said. "That's so cool."

"We had one child out of Southwest Florida who had a birth defect where she