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MID-CONTINENT

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Your Hometown Airline

by JOSH RITTENBERRY



AIR CHOICE ONE[®]

And now time for something a little different. This space is normally occupied with stories of scrappy ag pilots and operators who, despite hard lessons and losses, have prevailed to prosper and reflect on their journey. Though the root of this story has its origins in ag, this is a journey of a different route in aviation, albeit no less scrappy.

In the late 1970s Ivan Storz sold his interest in Festus Flying Service and chased his dream of flying helicopters. Soon thereafter he attained his rotor-wing rating and then he and a friend decided to buy a Bell 47. From that purchase a business was born. Multi-Aero, Inc. was founded by Ivan and friend Steve Goodwin in 1979, crop dusting throughout the week and giving helicopter rides on the weekends. The business hummed along for a few years until the early 1980s when Ivan was approached about managing the Festus Memorial Airport. From then on, Multi-Aero began to diversify its offerings, which now included aircraft maintenance, flight instruction, and aircraft rental. In 1985 the operation received its Part 135 Air Carrier Operating Certificate.

“The motivation for continuing the business was Multi-Aero, Inc. being a faith-based company that wanted to grow the company business so that it would have the resources that would allow the company to support the Kingdom of God as well as those in need, whether it be individuals, charitable causes, or to financially support those working in the ministry fields, as well as world missionaries serving in other countries,” says Shane Storz, son of Ivan.

Multi-Aero began as a small family affair with Ivan and wife Darlene and just two other employees. Ivan had hung on to the Bell 47, then added a Cessna 150 and Cessna 172, before adding a Beech Baron 58 for charter use. Then Ivan’s son, Shane, and daughter, Darnea, joined the fold. Shane eventually became the company’s chief pilot.

Success grew exponentially after Multi-Aero secured cargo contracts with the U.S. Postal Service in 1990 and UPS in 1992. The early 1990s were such a boon to the company that Multi-Aero expanded its reach to the Lake of the Ozarks in the form of Air Lake Aviation, where it offered everything from charter and cargo operations to fueling and hangaring services. Before the end of the decade, however, Air Lake Aviation and its name was sold to the City of Osage Beach.

As operations continued at Festus, Multi-Aero seized an opportunity, and in the gap left by Air Lake Aviation, Air Choice One was established at the company’s new facility at the Farmington Regional Airport to accommodate its jet and charter flights. Hauling passengers by day and cargo by night, Air Choice One operated up to 10,000 flight hours per year at its peak. And in just one year the operation had doubled in size.



As business continued to grow, the turn of the new millennium brought the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent economic downturn. The effect these disasters had on the aviation industry was devastating. Unlike any other business that struggled during that time, Multi-Aero was forced to liquidate its assets in 2004, reduce its staff, and turn over the Festus facility to the City of Festus.



In the intervening years, however, Air Choice One remained viable with the help of small community grants for scheduled air travel. This led to a winning bid for an Essential Air Service contract via the U.S. Department of Transportation. This contract not only opened doors, but new hubs of operations, the first of which came at the Kirksville Regional Airport with service to Lambert-St. Louis International Airport. Next came contracts with Decatur Airport, Southeast Iowa Regional Airport,

Mason City Municipal Airport, and Fort Dodge Regional Airport in Iowa; Jonesboro Municipal Airport in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Gogebic-Iron County Airport in Ironwood, Michigan; Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in Minneapolis, Minnesota; McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport in Jackson, Tennessee; and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia.

With a staff of 53 employees, Multi-Aero, Inc. (dba Air Choice One) boasts a fleet of nine Cessna Grand Caravans and two Beechcraft 1900C.

Shane Storz, now CEO of Air Choice One, says the business has been allowed to guide itself, mixing different operation structures that depend on the geography of the hubs.

“We all share more responsibilities this way. We tend to communicate better, be more efficient and flexible,” Shane goes on to say. “Due to the nature of our business, meaning we need to provide the best services possible to the communities we serve, our ‘stations,’

which are practically our company's divisions, tend to have more control over their own resources."

Just as business was once again flourishing, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in 2020 and severely disrupted air travel. "The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the whole world without acknowledging borders or economic sectors," Shane explains. "The aviation industry is a very sensitive sector that even the slightest threat to the safety and/or security of passengers can have a tremendous effect."



To overcome the hurdles of traveling in an age of COVID, Air Choice One has simplified its ticketing process, waved fees, and upgraded its operating procedures to keep employees and passengers safe. "In a few words, we rose to meet the challenges of a drastically altered travel environment, not only during flight but on the ground as well. I am very proud of everyone's efforts and dedication," Shane says.

Ignoring a so-called "doom and gloom" outlook, Shane prefers to find the positive, even in the most dire situations. Although air travel revenues, while recovering, continue to lag even after pandemic-era rules and restrictions on travel have been eased or lifted, the cargo demand reached an all-time high in 2020 and continues to grow today.

From a simple crop dusting operation to a multi-faceted and nationally-recognized aviation service, I asked Shane if there was any motto or words of wisdom which guide Multi-Aero and Air Choice One through good times and bad.

"We are proud to consider ourselves a Hometown Airline—your Hometown Airline," he says. "We operate that way. As a flexible carrier that works with local communities in order to provide a friendly, customized, and the most reliable service they deserve."



Current owners of Air Choice One include (left to right) Shane Storz, Darlene Storz and Darnea Wood.



We are looking forward to hitting the state convention circuit this fall. Join us at our booth and visit with Heather Riggs and Stan Hunter at the Kansas Aerial Applicators Convention in Mulvane, Kansas October 25-27.



Mid-Continent Attends ArkanSTOL

Representatives of Mid-Continent Aircraft attended ArkanSTOL Ozark Backwoods Challenge held at Byrd's Adventure Center (51AR) in Ozark, Arkansas. Aviat Aircraft was the main sponsor of the event, and Mid-Continent, as an Aviat Husky distributor, was on hand as one of the platinum sponsors.





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Canada Bound



Prairie Dusters, a successful operation from Birtle, Manitoba, Canada recently added another Thrush to their fleet when they picked up their latest addition here at Mid-Continent. The Thrush was dismantled by our team before Prairie Dusters owner Randy Sandstrom and engineer P.J. Smith hauled it back to their base in The Great White North.

(Pictured L-R: Stan Hunter, Joe Risner, P.J. Smith, Randy Sandstrom)



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1595 Since Factory New, Low Time Two Owner, 819.7 Useful Load, 150 Since Factory New MTV Three-Blade Propeller, Becker 720 Channel Com, Becker Transponder with Encoder, Garmin 560 GPS, ADS-B In/Out, Electronics International Digital Manifold Pressure EGT/CHT, EI Digital Tachometer, EI Digital Oil Pressure and Oil/Temp, Wing Tip Strokes, Landing Light, Front and Rear Seat Heat, 2 Place Intercom, Pilot/Co-Pilot PTT Switches, Extended Landing Gear, Rear Extended Baggage, Micro Dynamics Vortex Generators, 31-Inch Alaskan Bush Wheels, Alaskan Bush Tail Wheel, Like New Interior with Two Tan Fabric Seats.

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1996 THRUSH S2R-G1 N2237D

9688.0 A/F TT, Hatfield Bottom Load Fuel, A/C, Vortex Generators, New Satlock Bantam, Flow Control, Stainless Steel Spray System, AFS Check Valves, CP Nozzles, Agrinautics Pump, Lane Electric Brake, Aircraft Radios, Fresh Eddie Current, Spar Caps 3220 of 6,200 Hour Life

[More Info](#)

3,600 A/F TT, 800 HP, Load Hawg, VGs, Bottom Fuel/Dual Load, Intelliflow with Smart Pump, Leading Edge Lights, Stainless Steel Booms, Hopper Rinse, Bantam, Smoker, Spreader with Kicker Plate, CPs, MVP 50T Glass Panel

[More info](#)



2011 THRUSH S2R-T34 N70224

750 HP, 3100 TT Engine, Cascade Intake, Bantam GPS with G4, Screen, Intelliflow, 2-1/2" High Volume Spray Pump, Lane Electric Brake, Leading Edge Lights, Micro Vortex Generators, MVP-50 Glass Cockpit, Smoker, Bottom Load Fuel, Load Hawg, Added Step for Checking Oil, 10,500 Gross Weight Kit

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Very Clean and Well-Maintained! Cascade, MVT-50 Glass Panel, Load Hawg, Bantam GPS, Intelliflow, Leading Edge Lights, Vortex Generators, Smoker, Bottom Load Fuel

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2019 THRUSH, S2R-T34 N1009F

750 SHP Pratt & Whitney PT6A-34AG Turboprop Engine, Constant-Speed Hartzell Propeller, MVP-50T Glass Panel, Garmin G5 Attitude Indicator, 510-Fallon Fiberglass Hopper, 250-Amp Starter/Generator, Spray System w/ 41-inch Stainless Steel Gatebox For Dry Applications (seeding and fertilizer) and Emergency Liquid Dump Capabilities, Sherwin-Williams JETGLO Paint, Two-Inch Stainless Steel Spray System, Five-Blade Weath-Aero Cockpit Adjustable Fan, Three-Inch Side Loader, Streamlined Aluminum Booms, Wingtip Navigation and Strobe Lights, 228-Gallon Fuel System, Windshield Wiper and Washer, OAT Gauge, AmSafe Aviation Inflatable Restraint System, 29-Inch-High Flotation Tires and Wheels with Dual-Caliper Cleveland Brakes, and Zee Air Conditioner and Cabin Heat.

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1998 Air Tractor AT-802A N5094H

12,152.6 A/F TT, 1230 HP, 2000 SPOH, Reabe Digital Hopper, Quantity & Spray Boom Pressure, E-TEC Inc Fast Start System, Comm Radio, Hemisphere G4 GPS, RT Side Boom Shut Off, Smoker, Hydraulic Gate, Air Conditioner, Wipaire Vortex Generators, Wingman Wing Due at 15,823.2, Gear Due at 12,798.2, Eyebolt Stabilizer Due at 14,798.2, 4479.7 Hobbs

[More info](#)



1988 AIR TRACTOR AT- 301 N69WN

8,900 A/F TT, 600 HP, 530.0 SPOH, 320 Gallong Hopper, Ag Pilot X GPS, Flow Control, Smoker, Stainless Steel Boom, Air Conditioner, VGs, Lane Electric Brake, Bottom Load Fuel, 25-Inch Gate, 2 Each Spreaders

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1997 Ayres, S2R-G10 N773CC

6500.0 A/F TT, 400.0 SPOH, Cool Start System, Hatfield Single Point Fueling, ATS-VGs, Ag-Tips-Marburger, Kawak Hydraulic System, Satloc, G4, Load Hawg

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Mid-Continent Aircraft Corp. is located in Hayti, Missouri, 80 miles north of Memphis, Tennessee. Although Hayti is not the geographical center of our nation, Mid-Continent is the center for all ag aviation needs. With excellent daily truck freight lines, air freight, Federal Express, and UPS delivery capability, MID-CONTINENT has and will continue to cover the world.