

2002 - 2014

Wenatchee - Executive Flight

After retirement I moved to East Wenatchee. I still hadn't sold the house in Huron, but I thought it was time to go. I moved into the apartment Sue had and started doing all the stuff that I thought would keep me busy in retirement - including starting this history.

By around March we had decided that we should find a house to purchase, as I assumed I would unload the house in Huron soon. We found a house, still under construction in a neighborhood that we liked and we began the process of buying it.



Home 2002-present: 2354 Herndon Drive, East Wenatchee, WA

By this time I was beginning to feel that I had to find something to do to be productive and started looking for some kind of work. In March or April I applied with Executive Flight for a computer operator position, but before I could even interview

was advised that the opening had not developed, the girl who was leaving had decided to postpone her move for six months. In May I saw another Executive Flight ad looking for a dispatcher and I knew this would be something I was qualified to do. The ad said the job involved "late night" work which I assumed meant evening shifts - maybe working until midnight or 2:00 AM. I called, told them they had my resume on file and asked that I be considered for that position. An interview date was agreed upon and I decided to go to Havre to visit my mother. While there I received a call letting me know that the position I'd applied for was a midnight shift in case that mattered. I told them that I'd better discuss that with Sue and I'd get back to them. A couple of days later, while driving back to Wenatchee, I received another call and was told that regardless of my decision about the shift work they still wanted to do the interview.

Sue and I discussed the night work and decided I would give it a try and see how it worked out. When I went in for the interview I was informed that they'd decided that dispatchers would rotate through all shifts and the interview went pretty well. I thought it was odd however that I was never asked for references. A couple of hours after returning home I received a call asking if I could fax references **but not to worry because they intended to hire me!**

After I started working at Executive Flight (EFI) I realized that I wasn't even remotely qualified for the computer job that I'd originally applied for so things really did work out for the best.

I worked as a dispatcher (our official title was Flight Coordinator) at EFI for 11½ years which



Executive Flight, Inc.

was the longest I ever stayed at the same place through all my jobs. We quoted prices for charter flights, booked them, made arrangements for fuel, hotels and transportation when required and sometimes filed flight plans. Once a flight was in progress we followed the flight and pilots checked in with us as the flight progressed. For the first 10 years I was with the company we also provided air

ambulance aircraft for Airlift Northwest with bases in Wenatchee, Seattle and Juneau. These flights had to be launched within 20-45 minutes of notification and were generally considered very time critical. We also provided transportation for transplant teams from both Seattle and Portland, taking coordinators and surgeons to outlying hospitals where they procured organs for transplant at their centers.

A year or so after I started at EFI, when I felt that I was becoming reasonably competent, I began to recognize a lot of little changes that could improve the dispatch operation. We had forms that needed to be filled out three or four times a day and they were almost identical each time. There were forms that we completed by hand and then immediately typed into the computer and I couldn't understand why we just didn't record the information on the computer as it was received. I began to develop software to automate some of these and improve efficiency. Some of these attempts were rejected but most were accepted and became the standard way of doing things. I named this collection of programs "The Tool" but it was often called "Jim's Tool" by my co-workers.

In 2002, when I began at EFI the process to prepare a price quote for a charter flight was very slow and complicated. A program developed in the 1980s was used to compute time and distance between cities and calculate a "per-mile" cost. The flight coordinator then had to determine what fees and taxes needed to be added and calculate the final price. After this he or she had to type all this information into a formatted document to generate a formal quote that could be faxed to the customer. By 2004 it was obvious that the ancient software, and the volume of business, required that we obtain newer, state of the art programs. As an interim, while management sought the best software, I was asked to develop a temporary program to generate quotes. I developed a program and it worked so well it was never replaced. Over the years I modified the program many times to accommodate new business practices and unforeseen circumstances but it was still in use when the company ceased charter operations in 2013.

The busiest years in the 30+ years of operation for EFI were the period between 2004 and 2008 and I was told, more than once, that it was only because of the increased productivity due to the software I developed that allowed our office to function with the level of staffing that we had.

My third major project at EFI was development of a procedures manual. When I started I was given a large loose leaf binder and told that as I progressed through training I should add whatever reference information I needed to the binder. Each employee had a binder that contained information, procedural or regulatory, that we had to remember for our job. This seemed dumb - since we were new we didn't know what we needed to keep and, as mentioned earlier, there were a lot of details to remember. The other trainee and I ended up making a copy of another person's binder - a lot of which proved to be worthless. There was a procedures binder of sorts but it was only a loose collection of memos and letters that specified information about contracts, customs, and company policy. Additionally we had weekly staff meetings and the minutes of these meetings contained information that was directive in nature.

Part of the reason the dispatch office was functioning this way was that the operation had grown rather rapidly from one or two dispatchers and a few aircraft to 12 people and a fleet of about 18 aircraft operating from 3 bases. There was a "this is the way we've always done it" attitude and some of the people in a position to make decisions had no experience outside the company to recognize when change was necessary. With a very small staff it had worked, I guess, but to me, after my years with the FAA, this seemed like an incredibly inefficient and ineffective way to operate. I wasn't the only Flight Coordinator who felt this way and some of us began asking for a complete and concise procedures manual. Around the end of 2004 the lead dispatcher was directed to develop a manual.



A portion of the Executive Flight aircraft fleet in 2009

In the fall of 2005 I was asked to take over the project because the lead dispatcher wasn't able to find enough time to do the project. I was given the material that he had produced, about 10 or

15 pages. I also got access to computer files where I found that there had been at least two prior attempts at developing procedures documents. With my experience writing and maintaining these types of manuals in the FAA it wasn't too difficult to develop a manual and I had a draft finished by around Thanksgiving. After initial review a second draft was completed by the end of the year. There were about three levels of management that had to scrutinize and approve the document so it was June 2006 before it was formally approved, and then I was told to date the document as May 2006 because management had told some contract customers that we'd have the document in place by May! I was responsible for maintaining the manual over the next seven years, issuing about 19 revisions to change, update or refine the content.

Pay at EFI had never been particularly high but with my FAA retirement it was more than adequate. In 2007 they started an incentives program with bonus pay for collateral work and I started getting a 10% bonus for software development and a 10% bonus for maintaining the procedures manual. These bonuses continued until I took the supervisory position in 2012.

Due to some personal decisions made by the owner of the company, a series of questionable business decisions by management and changes in the overall economy the business went into a rapid decline after 2010. By the beginning of 2013 the company was a mere shadow of what I'd known when I started. Through attrition and layoffs the staff in the charter office had declined from 12 people, at its peak, to only 5 by the fall of 2012 when I became supervisor. By the spring of 2013 it looked like the company might close at any time as additional employees were laid off and the scope of our operations continued to contract. By the summer of 2013 we'd discontinued 24 hour staffing and there were only two of us working. We worked from home at night and on weekends. On October 15, 2013 the company ceased charter operations, and while I continued to be available for per-diem work I was again retired.

As I write this in May of 2014 the company still exists with three aircraft, four full time employees (none are pilots), and a handful of people who are part-time or on-call.

So that's my story up to now. I hope I've at least partially accomplished what I had in mind when I started this. I did get to tell some stories and in the process may have figured out a few things.

Dad was a "route-salesman" but I have to admit I never fully understood the "salesman" part of the job title - even when I was doing it. We just determined what a customer wanted, or needed, and then delivered it. Coke products really didn't need to be "sold", the route was established, people wanted the product and if someone wanted to be added to a route they would contact us.. It was simply a matter of filling orders or replacing stock.

Now I realize that we were "selling" service, reliability and trust. It's no wonder so many of dad's customers liked and respected him... and cared enough to tell me so.

When I retired from the FAA Sue mentioned something about how I was well liked and respected by my co-workers. I got to thinking about this and it struck me that this sounded very much like how people had talked to me about my dad so long ago. So maybe I've achieved something else I was trying to emulate in dad.