

PROFESSIONAL PILOT

OUR
53rd
YEAR

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NJet

From their home base at PWK (Chicago Exec, IL) N-Jet flies their clients to international and domestic destinations in a diverse fleet including Falcon, Cessna, and Astra jets. With one of their managed Falcon 900EX EASys are Founder/President/CEO Howard Seedorf (on stairs), with Director of Maintenance Scott Spjuth (L) and Chief Pilot Chad Seedorf.

International Operations

OPERATOR PROFILE

N-Jet has 40 years of service under Founder Howard Seedorf

With 15 jets and 35 pilots, this Part 135 op is based at PWK near Chicago and flies customers to domestic and international destinations.



By Brent Bundy
Phoenix Police Officer-Pilot
AS350, AW119, Cessna 210/182/172

From a single Cessna 172, N-Jet has grown into a full-service charter, maintenance and management operator for their clients in and around the greater Chicago region.

Aircraft charter operations in the Chicago market can be quite competitive. There are dozens of companies either based in or offering services from the metropolitan area of the 3rd most populated city in the USA. Perhaps the best way to stand out in such a hotly-contested region is to establish a solid reputation. And for the past 40 years, N-Jet has done just that. With

a firm foundation in safety, this family-owned business has evolved into a top choice for aircraft transportation, management and maintenance in the upper Midwest.

The beginning

Howard Seedorf grew up on the family farm in the outskirts of Cedar Rapids IA. His father, a milkman



Photos by Brent Bundy

N-Jet Founder, President and CEO Howard Seedorf began his career as an aerospace engineer nearly 50 years ago before following his dream to fly.

by trade, enjoyed the competitive hobby of harness horse racing. "My dad had cut a practice track on our property. One day, when I was 3 or 4 years old, I was out watching him ride when I looked up and saw the contrails of an airplane. I remember telling my mom, 'look, that plane is following dad's racetrack!' From that day, I knew that's what I wanted to do," Seedorf recalls. "When I was in high school, I told my guidance counselor I wanted to be a pilot. He told me I should probably go to a university and get an aerospace degree then I could probably get a pilot job. So that's what I did. I got a degree in aerospace engineering from Iowa State in 1972. The only problem was that I found out after graduating that I could build them, but I couldn't fly them!"

Not to be deterred, Seedorf put his education to work in his chosen field when he joined Collins Radio Company (later becoming Rockwell Collins and now Collins Aerospace) as an intern while still in college. During his time there, he even worked on avionics that were used in the Apollo space program. He stayed with Collins after graduation but soon realized that being an engineer was not his calling.

Unable to afford flight training, he looked for an alternate method to earn his wings and joined the Air Force. "I signed up in 1974, was sent to Lackland Air Force Base, and started officer training school. Four weeks later, the Arab oil embargo started and President Nixon

shut down non-essential oil uses, which included pilot training. I was offered a desk job but that's not what I wanted, so I left the Air Force after 4 weeks!"

Following his abbreviated military career, Seedorf went back to engineering work, this time for Sundstrand Aviation in Rockford IL. During his 4 years at Sundstrand, his space-connection continued when he contributed on components for the Space Shuttle program. This was also the time when he finally began flight training through the company's flying club. After earning his private pilot and instrument ratings, he purchased a brand-new Cessna 172 and started the Northern Illinois Flying Club. Little did he know at the time, but this was the beginning of his life's endeavor. This small flying club established on a grass strip near the Illinois-Wisconsin border in 1979 would become N-Jet.

From flying club to N-Jet

Seedorf explains, "As word spread about what we were doing, people would come to me and ask me to put their planes in my club and before long, we had 4 planes. Soon, we moved to the western suburbs of Chicago and began adding more and bigger planes."

By the mid-1980s, Seedorf was offered the opportunity to take over the flight school operations at 3CK (Lake in the Hills IL). "Our 'flying club' name didn't sound too sophisticated so, with a friend's suggestion, we changed the name to the Northern Illinois Flight Center, which allowed us to keep the same initials. To this day, we still operate under the NIFC corporate name," he declares.

The origins of the current company name were equally unexpected. Seedorf remembers, "We went to the FAA to obtain a callsign and gave them our list of requests. When they came back with what they would allow, it was 'ENJET', which we hadn't even requested! We liked it but didn't want to spell it out like that so for the new company name, we went with N-Jet."

Within a couple years, they would become the majority fuel purchaser at 3CK as more planes were added to their fleet. Shortly after, they were approached by a customer who told them they needed more capable



Chief Pilot Chad Seedorf currently oversees N-Jet's 35 pilots, some of whom have been with the company for over 20 years.

aircraft. Seedorf says, "He told us we needed some King Airs. So, he bought us a couple King Airs! Then a few years later he said, 'You really need a jet.' So, he bought us a Citation! He owned them but leased them back to us."

By that time, N-Jet was nearly the sole fuel customer on the field so, when the opportunity was offered, they purchased the FBO. Just as the initial growth of the flying club came by word of mouth and chance, so did the expansion of N-Jet. "We weren't looking for business, it just came to us," Seedorf states. "And as more business came, the aircraft got larger and larger. When a customer purchased a Falcon 50 and later moved up to a Falcon 900, the 3800 ft runway at Lake in the Hills just wouldn't work." So, with the need for more runway and more hangar space, they moved to their current location of PWK (Chicago Executive, IL) in 2002.

Operations today

As business expanded and their fleet grew, N-Jet needed someone at the helm to assist Seedorf in the day-to-day operations. They didn't need to look far. In fact, Seedorf didn't even need to leave home. Second in command at N-Jet is **Chief Pilot Chad Seedorf**, Howard's son.

Having grown up around the family business, Chad was exposed to aviation quite early. "I was flying before I was even born!" the younger Seedorf exclaims. "My dad was run-

ning the flight school and I would sit in the back of his 172s during flight training. I flew my first solo flight when I was 16 and had my private pilot's license by 17."

Chad joined the family business while still in high school in 1993. "This is the only place I've ever worked," he states. Even with that background, he still wasn't sure he wanted a career in flying. "I always knew I wanted to fly but not necessarily as a job, so I went to college to be an accountant. I hated it. That's when I came back to work for my dad. I enjoy working with numbers and I like accounting work, but I couldn't see myself in an office all day. I need to be out and about." He first became a captain on their Beechcraft Baron, then moved on up through the Cessna Conquest and Citation, and is now a check airman in the Citation Excel and the Astra. Even with his administrative duties as the chief pilot, he still flies around 40 hours a month and has accumulated over 13,000 flight hours.

Those daily duties have him overseeing the 35 pilots that work for N-Jet. While the current pilot shortage has had some effect on them by losing a few to the airlines, they have very little turnover throughout the company. "We have several employees, including pilots, who have been with us for over 20 years," Seedorf points out, and credits much of that to the way his father has run N-Jet over the years. "A lot of it is our transparency, in the way we handle our people and our planes.



DOM Scott Spjuth worked in corporate aviation and for an airline before taking over at N-Jet's repair and maintenance operation.



With 75,000 sq ft of hangar space at PWK, N-Jet can easily house and maintain their diverse fleet of chartered and managed aircraft. They have been at this airport for 17 years and moved into their current space in 2013.

The proprietary online apps and SMS (Safety Management System) that we have developed, no one else has. They actually help us sell ourselves to potential customers as well as pilots." After joining N-Jet, pilots receive simulator training twice a year, once in each of the 2 types of aircraft they fly. CAE is utilized for the Falcons and Citations, and FlightSafety is used for the Astras.

Diversified fleet

As Chief Pilot Seedorf points out, like their pilots, they have experienced low turnover rates on their airplanes. "We don't own any of the planes that we operate, but when a customer brings us their plane to manage and charter for them, we rarely lose them as a client. Just as we have employees that have been with us for 2 decades, we also have airplane owners who have been clients with us for that long."

While the beginnings of their operations can be traced back to that first Cessna 172, the current fleet has evolved to an impressive selection of 15 aircraft that provides their charter customers several options, whether traveling domestically or internationally. For their longest-range flights, they offer 1 of 3 Dassault Falcon 900s, a B-model and 2 EX EASys. Intermediate distances are covered by their Falcon 2000, Astra SPX and Astra G/100s. Shorter flights are flown in a selection of Cessna Citations including a CJ3, V, Excel and Encores. All flights are available with

a variety of services including catering with onboard cabin attendants, transportation options at departure and destination, and much more, which can be arranged through their scheduling team, 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. Several of the aircraft are also equipped with inflight WiFi. Unlike other charter operations, N-jet has no membership fees or monthly charges, just straightforward pricing and booking of flights.

Culture of safety

Of all the accomplishments the senior Seedorf has achieved, perhaps his proudest is his SMS, which was developed by Seedorf himself, tapping into his years of engineering and flight experience. While it's easy to claim to put safety first, N-Jet has



VP of Marketing & Sales Trevor Janz has been in the aviation industry for his entire career. He joined N-Jet in late 2018 due to their reputation and high safety standards.

made it a part of their culture. "We have an extremely robust SMS that is so seamless and so integrated, our staff is using a safety system without even realizing it. As they build their flight time in the program, the risk analysis is completed simultaneously. But what is unique about what we do is that we capture the data and analyze it. We can go back to 1994 with the data that we have collected."

This SMS was put into place in 2008, the same year that N-Jet became the first charter operation to obtain approval for iPad use in their paperless cockpit. In 2012, they were also one of the initial operators to go live with the FAA's Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP), a voluntary platform that allows employees to self-report safety issues and events, with the goal of preventing accidents and incidents by reviewing reports and correcting rather than disciplining. This dedication to safety by N-Jet is recognized by not only their customers but by standardization organizations as well. Their efforts have garnered them the accreditation trifecta: IS-BAO Stage 3, ARGUS Platinum and WYVERN Wingman Certification. "We're proud of our reputation and the safety program we've put in place for our pilots and our clients," Seedorf proclaims.

Maintenance done in-house

Another contributor to the safety at N-Jet is their maintenance facility. The volume of flights they operate necessitated early-on that they obtain their own Part 145 Repair Station Certificate. Housed at the N-Jet facility at PWK, the maintenance is completed by Chicago Executive Service Center (CESC), a subsidiary of N-Jet.

In charge of this endeavor is **DOM Scott Spjuth**. Growing up a mile from O'Hare airport, he saw the aircraft arriving and departing on a daily basis but was never drawn to aviation until later in high school. "I always liked tinkering with things, taking them apart, putting them back together. With a little guidance, I started looking into aircraft maintenance," Spjuth recalls.

After completing his associate degree at Lewis University, southwest of Chicago, Spjuth went to work for Air Wisconsin. Following a break from aviation for a couple years, he



Under the N-Jet umbrella is Chicago Executive Service Center, a Part 145 Repair Station. They perform maintenance on their aircraft as well as non-managed customer planes.

began working for a Falcon 10 owner who brought his plane to Howard Seedorf for management. "That was 20 years ago and I'm still here! I came over as a mechanic and then 2 years later I was offered the DOM position." Spjuth holds that title at both N-Jet and CESC. They were separate entities until 2005 when they were joined and Spjuth began the dual-oversight.

Spjuth currently has a quality control person and 4 mechanics working for him. He feels that this is enough for their current workload but if replacements or additional positions are needed, he knows it will be difficult. "You can't find them right now. The pilot and maintenance shortages are real and getting worse. We're always looking and so is everyone else, especially the airlines." Having spent time in corporate and commercial work, Spjuth has seen both sides and is quite happy where he's at. "Unlike the airlines, there's no pressure here. Everything with N-Jet is about safety," he remarks.

Steady growth for a solid future

As Howard Seedorf mentioned, N-Jet has been fortunate to have much of their business come to them without seeking it out. That applies to customers as well as internal personnel. The most recent to join the team is **Vice President of Marketing & Sales Trevor Janz**. With his father in the Air Force and an uncle who

owned an FBO, Janz declares, "I was born in aviation!" Although his eyesight kept him from flying in the military, he still pursued his passion and had his private license and instrument rating by the time he was 19 years old. After college, his first job was selling aircraft exhaust systems. "I loved it, that was my 'in' to the industry, and it's a great industry. Aviation is a family."

When Janz decided he wanted to expand his career, he knew he had to be involved in jet aircraft versus the smaller piston planes he'd always worked with. When he started looking for a new position, one thing that was vitally important to him was reputation, both his and whom he'd work for. "No matter what I'm selling, it's still me. And when I looked at N-Jet, I couldn't find a bad word. They have a top-notch reputation and that meant the world to me."

Janz has only been with N-Jet for a few months but in that time he has been indoctrinated to their safety culture. "We have great aircraft, a prime location, etc, but what makes my job easier is the importance of safety. We don't 'sell' a customer. We just show them the facts and figures and N-Jet sells itself. That is also key to our slow-but-steady growth."

Assisting with that growth is another member from the family tree, founder Howard Seedorf's daughter, **Erika Seedorf Walker**. She started her career early working small jobs for N-Jet in the late 1990s but joined

in a full-time capacity in 2010. And now she currently handles marketing and internal communications including press releases, website copy, and the employee newsletter. Erika says, "I've watched my dad tirelessly build N-Jet since before I can remember. I take great pleasure putting my skills and experience to work for the family business."

The building of N-Jet has also included conservative expansion. In addition to the CESC repair station, they own another charter operation, Wolf Aviation in Syracuse NY. It is solely a charter facility with no aircraft on-site, although N-Jet is considering all options for that location. They also recently took over the management of 3 Astra jets in Phoenix AZ for an air medical operator. As far as other developments, President Seedorf states, "I'm living the dream, literally. If more opportunities present themselves, we will look at them, but I love what we're doing now."

From farm field to the future

Several decades ago, a young boy looked to the skies and saw a plane. To him, it was more than just a plane, it was his future. There was no way he could have known that he was looking at the inspiration to a life-long adventure. What that boy did know, was that somehow, someday, he would live his dream of aviation.

From that Iowa farm field to a grass strip in northern Illinois and the skies of the world, Howard Seedorf has lived that dream. 40 years ago he set in motion what would become one of the top choices for aircraft charter, management and maintenance in the greater-Chicago area. With a foundation in safety, backed by a solid reputation, and judicious expansion, N-Jet is well-prepared to continue Seedorf's dream. ✈️



Brent Bundy has been a police officer with the Phoenix Police Dept for 27 years. He has served in the PHX Air Support Unit for 17 years and is a helicopter rescue pilot with nearly 4000

hours of flight time. Bundy currently flies Airbus AS350B3s for the helicopter side of Phoenix PD's air unit and Cessna 172, 182s and 210s for the fixed-wing side.