

THE LIST

Shortages on Horizon for Valley Aviation Firms

LIST: Lack of hangar space and skilled pilots could slow industry growth.

By MARK R. MADLER Staff Reporter

A lack of hangar space, a pilot shortage and shared charter jets are among the factors impacting the private aviation industry in the San Fernando Valley.

As one of the busiest general aviation airports in the world, Van Nuys Airport and the aviation companies located there are not immune to these and other changes taking place in this world of million-dollar jets and the passengers who fly in them.

Brian Counsil, president of **Sun Air Jets**, the No. 5 on the Business Journal's Air Charter Operators list, said that the pilot shortage has been on the radar for many in the industry for the past few years but that now it is exerting an influence on business.

Commercial airlines can more easily recruit pilots and the military is doing what it can to retain pilots, including offering bonuses. In addition, the standards for the number of hours required to fly private jets is increasing, Counsil said.

"The pace at which new pilots are being produced is trailing the demand for them," he explained.

Clay Lacy Aviation, the No. 1 firm on the list, is dealing with the issue of the pilot shortage in several ways. **Scott Cutshall**, spokesman



Prime Spot: Sun Air facility in Camarillo.

for the Van Nuys aircraft charter and management company, said it was seeing early signs of the pilot shortage two years ago and knew it would get worse. So it made adjustments to pilot salaries by increasing them 20 percent to 25 percent.

"Our owners were very responsive to that and it helped in holding onto quality pilots in this market," Cutshall said.

Clay Lacy manages more than 100 aircraft and will use the planes for charters when not in use by their owners.

Another way the company is addressing the pilot shortage is by offering scholarships to programs at **Flight Path Learning Center** at Los Angeles International Airport, **Orange Coast College** in Orange County and the **University of North Dakota** to help students afford flight lessons.

Sun Air Jets, which has hangar space at

Van Nuys and Camarillo airports, has met the need by attracting and keeping its pilots with better schedules that include coordinated days off, increased benefits, improved salary rates, opportunities for promotions from within and moving from flying smaller aircraft to larger planes.

"Many of the most successful pilots in our organization are ones that started in smaller aircraft and today they are flying the large cabin, long-range international airplanes in our fleet," Counsil said.

But **Phillip Derner**, the Western regional representative for **National Business Aviation Association**, a Washington, D.C. advocacy group, said that pilots aren't the only job title that the industry faces a shortage of. It also extends to mechanics, dispatchers and schedulers, he said.

"Every role in aviation is having a serious workforce challenge these days," Derner added.

At Van Nuys, **Signature Flight Support**, which has multiple locations at the airfield, has not let its business growth make it overlook the community, Derner said.

"They mentor a lot of young folks and work to bring in young people from college and preparing them for management positions," he added. "That is a true investment, not just in their business but in our industry."

Besides personnel, the aviation industry also lacks hangar space, as development at airports has lagged behind the increased number of private jets. Also, larger aircraft, such as the Gulfstream 650, take up more space.

"You talk to the Signature or others around

Van Nuys, they don't really have a surplus in hangar space," said Counsil of Sun Air.

The firm has 140,000 square feet of hangar space spread across five buildings in Camarillo, and an additional 41,000 square feet at Van Nuys. Their entitlements at both airports last another two decades.

"We cannot be at the risk of not having real estate," Counsil said. "It's a major part of what we do when you manage aircraft."

Clay Lacy's Cutshall said that technology looms as another challenge for the industry. In avionics, the **Federal Aviation Administration** has mandated operators install automatic surveillance-broadcast equipment in all aircraft to give more accurate position reporting, and customers want improved Wi-Fi connectivity aboard planes.

The final challenge Cutshall sees is shared charter flights and aircraft ownership.

Shared charter operators fly on a schedule to a common destination rather than on-demand. An example is JetSuite, No. 3, on the list, which operates that type of service from Hollywood Burbank Airport.

Cutshall does not foresee a time when shared, per-seat charter operations will replace the traditional model of passengers being able to go when and where they want.

"I don't think that will go away and everybody is only going to fly on shared private jets," he added.

Of the 17 firms on the list, 12 are located at Van Nuys, five at Hollywood Burbank Airport and one at Camarillo. Desert Jet, No. 15, flies out of both Van Nuys and Burbank.

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