

Get To Know Owner Jim McCool

It was in Akron, Ohio, where he grew up, that Jim McCool became the second employee of Hampton Pension Services in 1985. After Charles Schwab acquired the company, Jim moved up the ranks and was executive vice president for a decade before retiring in July of 2017. He fell in love with the Coachella Valley on a golf trip in 1996. Ten years later, he and his wife, Diana, bought a getaway home in Palm Desert. They now have two residences: one in Akron and one at Toscana Country Club in Indian Wells. In 2018, Jim became part owner of Desert Jet and in 2020, along with his wife, acquired full ownership.

When did you first become interested in aviation?

When I was a kid, my dad often took me to the local airport's observation deck. I had a strong interest in all things science, and I followed every space mission. In my early 40s, I wanted to ensure I wasn't in the camp of people who regretted not having done something bold. I took up flying around 2001.

What planes have you owned?

I bought a Cessna 182 in 2005. My wife and I were flying around the country. On a flight from Boston to Akron, when we were traveling against strong headwinds, she asked, "Do you think we can find something a little faster?" I bought a Columbia 400, like a sports car in the sky. The next aircraft was a Piper Meridian, which I sold and bought a Citation CJ3. When I became part owner of Desert Jet in 2018, there was a demand for such a light jet, so we put it on the company's charter certificate.

As a former senior executive for Charles Schwab, no doubt you have a good eye for investments. Why did you decide to buy part and then sole ownership in Desert Jet?

I always had a hunch I would someday get involved with an aviation-related business. In December of 2017 when we flew into Thermal, California, and after Desert Jet's crew and management greeted us, I felt like I had just flown Air Force 1 onto the ramp. I had been to FBOs around the country and seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. Desert Jet's customer experience was



so exceptional and was the best I have seen. So, I said, "Maybe we can use my background to grow Desert Jet and hopefully benefit the local community as well as the industry."

What is your vision as owner of Desert Jet?

First and foremost is maintaining the culture that translates to a great experience, which is being done by [CEO] Jared Fox and his team. But demand for flights has outgrown our footprint. We constantly look for aircraft for our charter operations

and have contracts with big-name operators to supplement their fleets. We are working with the county to lease additional property to build a second hangar/office complex. With all the development activity and new residents in the area, there has been a 25 percent growth rate in aviation operations at Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport. We are driving more awareness to the need for a control tower to allow more traffic, while ensuring safety. We are working with government officials

and local leaders to make that a reality. Third on my list for the airport is a customs and immigration facility to clear aircraft coming over the border. We want to welcome the world to Thermal and make it a gateway to the Coachella Valley.

Who flies with you besides your wife?

Our dogs — a Cavalier King Charles named Winston and a Havanese named Penny — love to fly. If I just say the word "airport," they cock their heads and their tails start wagging.