

General Aviation enters the air ambulance business

Piedmont General Aviation has joined forces with North Carolina Baptist Hospital of Winston-Salem to form AirCare International, an air ambulance service that will provide on-demand transportation of patients throughout the United States and internationally.

AirCare International is the first venture of Piedmont General Aviation into the air ambulance business, and it also represents North Carolina's first medical center-based ambulance using a fixed-wing aircraft rather than a helicopter.

Cathie McDonald, Piedmont's program director for the air ambulance, said the service represents a new and very specialized aircraft sales and leasing program which provides everything from a modified air ambulance, to specially trained flight crews and maintenance.

"The new program broadens an already wide range of services available from the General Aviation Division," she said, "and we will soon begin marketing our air ambulance package to public and private organizations wishing to provide this type of community service."

AirCare International's special strength is its combination of the highest standards in aviation, with first-class, medical center-based health care, she added.

Under the joint arrangement, Piedmont General Aviation provides the aircraft, a Beechcraft King Air 100, the flight crew and a maintenance program, while the Bowman Gray/Baptist Hospital Medical Center provides the medical expertise.

The aircraft is configured to carry two patients and three health professionals—a nurse, a paramedic and a third person representing whatever medical expertise might be needed for a particular flight. For instance, that person might be a doctor or a respiratory therapist.

Joe Culler, president of Piedmont General Aviation, said the twin-engine King Air, which is based at the General Aviation facility at Smith Reynolds Airport, reaches a cruising speed of 260 mph and has about a 1,000 mile-range. He said the aircraft requires a two-man crew, and that six pilots have been specifically designated and trained to fly the air ambulance.

"All of us here at Piedmont General Aviation are very pleased and excited to be a supporting partner in Baptist Hospital's air ambulance program," Culler said. "The acceptance of fixed-wing aircraft into their program adds a new



Among those on hand to view AirCare's modified Beechcraft King Air 100 were General Aviation representatives (l to r) Wayne Schomp, director-flight operations; Cathie McDonald, program director-air ambulance; Joe Culler, president-general aviation; Jim Taylor, vice president, general manager-general aviation; and Craig Pinto, chief pilot.

dimension and greater flexibility much needed in air ambulance service. We look forward to a very successful working relationship with AirCare."

The principal users of AirCare International's services will be doctors and social service workers who need to transport patients from one type of health care setting to another.

"AirCare International has the extensive on-board life support technology which permits caring for seriously ill or traumatized patients whose conditions are stable," said Richard Snow, director of AirCare at Baptist.

Each AirCare International flight requires the approval of a medical control officer, he said, and the joint medical/flight team is typically able to respond to a call within a half hour.

Baptist's AirCare control officer, who is the on-duty emergency room physician, receives the request for AirCare service via the toll free AirCare telephone number (800-252-1955). The patient's diagnosis and vital statistics are recorded, as well as the medications and equipment that may be called for inflight.

The control officer then "scrambles" the medical flight team—Baptist's nurses and paramedics review the patient's condition and situation,

while Piedmont's flight crew verifies weather conditions, files a flight plan and prepares the aircraft for departure. If all is green, the patient is then transported to the waiting AirCare air ambulance at the General Aviation facility.

"The most critical flights will probably involve patients who need either an organ transplant or special care for a heart attack," McDonald said. However, she emphasized that the key to deciding whether a patient can be transported is if he or she is in "stable" condition.

"The crew stays in touch with Baptist dispatch throughout the entire flight, and during any refueling stops along the way," McDonald said. "AirCare's mission is complete when—and only when—the patient arrives at the doors of the destination hospital via prearranged ground ambulance."

Not all missions will involve patients being transported strictly to or from Baptist Hospital. In fact, according to McDonald, the majority of trips will involve flights between facilities outside the state. And, she added, though the aircraft will be ready to fly at any time, most flights will be scheduled between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.



Penny Latham (right), founder of the Ronald McDonald House in Winston-Salem, accepts fruit baskets on behalf of the Ronald McDonald House from reservations agents (l to r) Don Johnson, Debbie Hickman, and Doris Beamer, co-chairpersons of the Intro-Community Services Committee.

Composed of over thirty Winston-Salem reservations agents, members of the Intro-Community Services Committee donate their free time for

projects in the community including the Methodist Children's Home, the Ronald McDonald House, the Make a Wish Foundation, and needy families at Christmas. Joyce Greene, personnel representative, INTRO, is the committee's advisor.

The Ronald McDonald House is a home away from home for families who have a child who is receiving care at a nearby medical center.