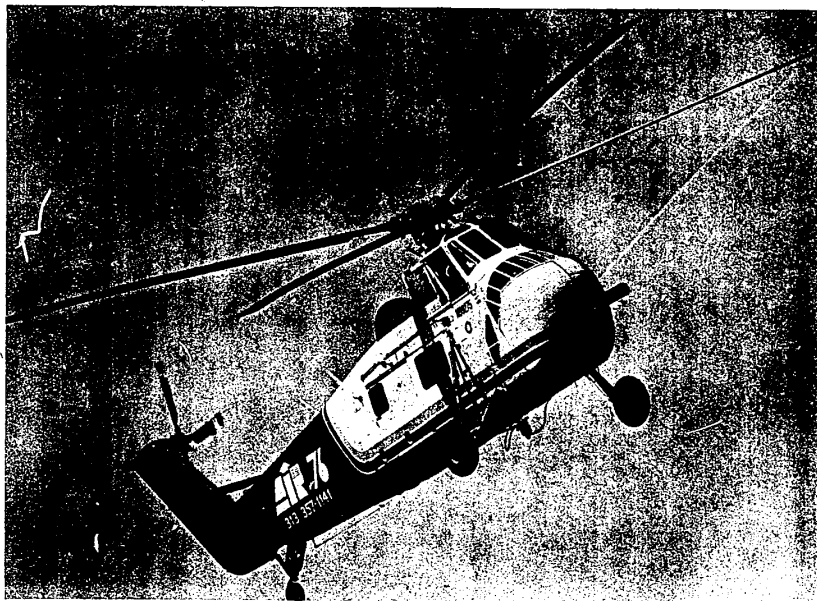


Thursday, May 12, 1977

(S&amp;C P#401B, W.T. 15D)



Pilot Don Werner raises the helicopter above Southfield's Civic Center on Evergreen. (Staff photos by Gary Friedman)

## Wild blue yonder has a green hue for Air 76 crew

By CARL STODDARD

**Sunlight is just breaking over the horizon. Lights blink on in neighborhoods as residents ready themselves for another day. The main roads begin swelling with morning traffic.**

**Out of the early morning quiet comes the sudden flutter of a helicopter. Appearing over the trees, it quickly settles down next to a construction site.**

Minutes later the helicopter is back in the air, hoisting a two-ton air conditioner, dangling below it. Chopping the air as it goes, the helicopter pulls the huge metal box up and gently deposits it on top of a building under construction.

Workers help swing the unit into place and disconnect the hoist. And in a swirl of dust, the helicopter disappears beyond the trees.

Sudden appearances by dawn's early light are stock in trade for Air 76 Inc., a new Southfield-based helicopter company that is carving out a name for itself as an airborne contractor.

The company, now in its fourth month of operation, specializes in hoisting air conditioners, steel beams and other heavy items to the top of construction sites. In many cases, the helicopter is used to reach heights inaccessible to regular construction cranes. It also can be used for routine construction projects.

"YOU CAN literally build a building with a helicopter," said Air 76 pilot Don Werner.

Although that hasn't been tried, the company has helped to construct several projects in the area, including Fairlane Town Center, Lakeside Mall and the Renaissance Center.

Air 76 was founded last July by Francis C. McMath, former president of Whitehead and Kales, a heavy steel fabricating company based in River Rouge. McMath retired from the company two years ago after 17 years of service and, at the age of 52, decided it was too soon to relax in a Florida condominium.

McMath said he and his son-in-law "just tumbled into" the helicopter business. But he soon discovered the need for a high-flying external load carrying business and Air 76 started to lift off.

"Business is going twice as well as we expected it to go," McMath said. "There's just a lot of work around."

He estimates the company reached the break-even point after only three months of operation and now predicts year-end billings will total more than \$250,000.

Although the company was formed last summer, it was not until this spring that McMath managed to at-

tract the personnel he needed to get the operation off the ground, including corporate treasurer Nancy Hutchison.

McMATH RECRUITED veteran pilot Werner, who returned to Michigan from Saudi Arabia, where he helped unload ships in a crowded port facility.

Floyd "Pete" Moyer, an old friend of Werner, was hired as chief mechanic and general manager. The selection of Moyers was as critical as that of the pilot, McMath said.

"A pilot has to know and trust his mechanic," McMath said. "It's very critical. When a pilot's placing steel there are people under him helping to guide the steel. It takes a special expertise to make sure everything goes right."

To prevent errors and mechanical failures, each helicopter used by the company receives 90 minutes of mechanical attention for every 60 minutes it is in the air. Maintenance procedures also call for replacing parts after a prescribed number of air hours, whether the part appear to need replacement or not. It's a time-consuming system, but it is generally preferable to discovering a mechanical problem while hovering over a 20-story building with a load of steel.

Because such situations are still possible, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) places restrictions on when external loads can be flown over populated areas. As a result, most flights are conducted in early morning and on weekends.

Air 76 is the only heavy helicopter service based in Michigan. At the present time the company has the ability to lift up to 4,500 pounds.

A typical operation costs \$3,000 with an additional charge of about \$50 for each lift.

Despite its use of helicopters, Air 76 is primarily a construction company. Both the pilot and chief mechanic are members in good standing with the local operating engineers union. McMath, too, sees the company as an extension of his former work in the construction field.

Air 76 is located at 19150 Ten Mile in Southfield.



The helicopter's monster nine-cylinder engine can lift up to 4,500 pounds and, for safety's sake, requires 90 minutes of mechanical attention for every 60 minutes it is in the air.



McMATH



WERNER



MOYER



HUTCHISON



The copter's hoist is part of the key to its ability to surely and safely lift the payloads which heavy construction requires.

## Gabriel Spina doesn't live by pizza alone

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Man doesn't live by bread alone—or even pizza. Gabe Spina, owner of Mama Mia's Restaurant and Pizzeria, just celebrated his 15th anniversary in the Eight Mile spot just east of Evergreen in Southfield.

Though the hours are long and every day of the week is a business day, Spina has made time for other interests. He's an avid fisherman whose catches adorn the walls of the intimate family restaurant.

You can find lake perch, shrimp, oysters and crab on the menu and mackerel, bonito tuna and bull dolphin on the paneled walls.

A loyal worker for the Southfield Lions, Spina has a certificate of appreciation from the group hung behind the cash register with the family pictures.

"I opened this restaurant 15 years ago on May 1," he said. "I was just a young man. My mother, Anita, and my Dad, Joseph, helped out for a lot of years until my Dad died in April."

Spina's son Joe, 17, and his wife, Ann, also help out in the business. The Spinas, who live in Beverly Hills, also have four daughters: Mary Anita, Patty Ann, Gabriel and Ann Marie.

SPINA, a native Detroit, started out as a social work-

er with the Boys Clubs of Detroit after earning a degree in communication arts with a minor in sociology and philosophy.

"I also went to law school for more than a year," he said.

"Social work is personally rewarding but not monetarily," he reflected. "It was okay when I was young, but when you get more responsibility, it's different."

Spina spent what he calls a 20-month "apprenticeship" with his father-in-law, Jim Tringali, at the Mama Mia's Restaurant on Plymouth Road in Livonia.

His original operation in Southfield seated about 100, but in 1967, he expanded the place to seat 250 and put in full bar service.

"Where the bar is now, I used to have my kitchen," he said.

Mama Mia's really caters to families, according to Spina, who said the best-sellers on the menu are pizzas, spaghetti and veal parmesan.

The dining room is comfortable and warm, wood-paneled walls, red-plaid table covers and flowers on each table add to the family atmosphere.

Daily hours at Mama Mia's are from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Sundays. On Mother's Day they

opened early, at 1 p.m.

Spina does his deep-sea fishing in Florida, in the Clearwater area, where he has been involved in the building of condominiums. He also is a general partner in the group that hopes to build an arena across from the Silverdome Stadium in Pontiac.

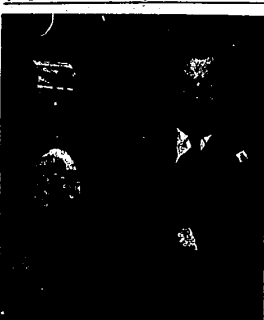
"WE SORT of think it's gonna go," he said. One of the most satisfying aspects of Spina's business has been the stability his employees have shown.

"It's unusual among kitchen help but I have the same woman cooking for me now that I had 12 years ago," he said. "In addition to Virgie Bires the cook, I have waitresses who have worked for me for as long as seven years."

Natley Clig has worked as a waitress while going to school and already earned a degree at Wayne State University.

"Now she's taking her master's at Oakland University and she hopes to be a doctor," Spina said. "And Sally Siak has also worked here seven years. She used to live around the corner and now she commutes to come here."

Spina himself is in the restaurant just about every day, but recently has shortened his own hours.



Spina, a "white cane" on his lapel, is also a hard-working member of the Lions Club. (Staff photo)