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Easing the financial and scheduling crunch on business customers and tourists could become a popular pastime of ambitious entrepreneurs such as Dick Greenough (right) if services similar to Airtaxi take hold. (Photos by David Frank)

Charter 'seat' firm uses private planes

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

A charter plane flies regularly to Philadelphia, delivering business materials. Its eight seats are empty both ways.

Another air taxi flies a businessman to Tampa and returns to point of departure also empty. A third is hired to fly two people to Mackinac Island with plenty of room for extra passengers.

Chartering a private plane may not be possible, but you may be able to charter one of those empty seats with a little help from Airtaxi. Airtaxi is a new charter information service founded by Dick Greenough of Bloomfield Hills to put potential passengers and air taxi in touch with each other.

Greenough is a businessman and pilot who has given himself one year to make the idea work. Eventually he hopes to be a national company, but for the moment he is headquartered in Pontiac Airport with subsidiary offices in Miami, Fla.

Airtaxi is based on a simple principle: The plane is flying to its destination anyway, so its owner might as well sell you one of those empty seats.

According to Greenough, there are about 4,000 air taxis flying into 10,000 airports nationwide. Some are huge international airports; others are small scale landing strips.

THE PLANES range from a twin-engine Cessna 310 to a highly sophisticated Lear jet. Some planes make regular daily runs; most fly only when hired.

Air taxis have been around for a long time, but two things have happened recently to make this flight brokerage service attractive. Deregulating air travel caused many airlines to pull out of small towns and fly bulk carriers into large regional airports.

Also fuel costs have risen so dramatically that charter flights, with prices based on round-trip mileage, have become prohibitive in cost. Few people charter planes, and it gets harder and harder to justify flying with empty seats.

Greenough discovered the convenience of charter travel after he gradu-

ated with a master's degree in business from the University of Michigan in 1959 and began to work for the accounting firm of Touche, Ross and Co. He flew commercial airlines and worked on projects all over the U.S. as well as in Europe and South America.

At one time he flew weekly to Raleigh, N.C., and then rented a car to reach a smaller town not serviced by a major airline.

"I would reach my business destination mid-afternoon and the day would be shot," he said. "A private plane would take me there in two or three hours but few people can afford the cost. The air taxi operator must charge you for a return trip whether you come back or not."

Eight years ago, Greenough started flying his own plane. He quickly learned how to find an empty seat on an already chartered plane, sometimes cheaper than commercial flights, always more convenient. Several months ago he started his own business.

THE COMPANY screens and lists air taxi operators, all of whom are licensed to carry passengers, are properly insured, meet Federal Aeronautics Administration standards for equipment and pilots, and are regulated by the Civil Aeronautics Board.

Airtaxi calls its taxi operators regularly to collect scheduling information. If a charter is flying to Tampa at your designated time, he calls and puts you in touch with that charter operator. You and the operator make your own arrangements. Airtaxi charges the air taxi a fee for the service if you fly.

After you have used the service once, Airtaxi expects you to become a member at rates of \$20 for the first six months or \$30 for a year of unlimited use.

Greenough has only put a few dozen people in the air so far, but he foresees four categories of travelers as members.

● The business traveler who needs to fly to out-of-the-way places and is flexible enough to finalize his travel plans at the last minute;



● The traveler who is already involved with aviation, who knows and loves planes and is already to satisfy his curiosity about a certain type of plane.

● Some vacationers, especially those who don't need to know six months in advance when they will fly.

● Commuters, who might make regular runs, for example, between Detroit and the Upper Peninsula. Eventually Greenough also intends to explore the specialized freight aspects that would be a natural for this type of venture.

"If you are sending a prize hunting dog to a small town you probably don't want to do it on a commercial airline flying to a major city."

There is a catch, of course. Some charters fly the same route every day, like the plane that delivers cancelled checks to Philadelphia, but most don't know where they are going until a few days in advance.

If you can fly anytime within a given week or can make your flight plans with only a two-day notice, you have the best chance of using this to advantage.

Airtaxi can often, but not always, get you to the destination of your choice, but it makes no promises about getting home. On that Philly flight, you can be sure that plane will be back every day, but you can't expect it to wait and take you back the same day. The key word is flexible.

Greenough expects to offer service in the upper Great Lakes, and on regular runs to places like Atlanta and Florida, as well as within Michigan.

He eventually hopes to span the continent and overseas. You never know whether a good idea is going to fly until you try it.

For more information about Airtaxi call the Pontiac Airport office at 872-7774. Some typical rates, negotiated individually are \$100 to Tampa, \$40 to Philadelphia, and \$35 to Rochester, N.Y., all one-way.

Mid-winter anniversary celebration calls for skiing, with gourmet touch

Q. My wife and I want to go away for a cross country ski vacation to celebrate our anniversary in February. We want to ski during the day, but at night we would like a little luxury. Any suggestions?

A. The Chateau Montebello has been called the biggest log cabin in the world. It is on 100 square miles of land and has a gourmet dining room.

No, that is not a typographical error. It is on 100 square miles of land, and is the overnight stop on the 100-mile cross country ski race held every year between Ottawa, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

The chateau is built on land given by a king of France to a church official centuries ago as a seigneurie. The land was bought in the 1920s by a promoter who contracted to build a very exclusive private club called the Seigneurie Club. He ordered enough logs from British Columbia to build a large building with a six-story lobby, a large dining room and several wings of bed-

rooms.

Before he could build, the Depression bankrupted him. The Canadian Pacific Railways took the land in payment for the logs and built the elegant sideaway that was known for years as the Seigneurie Club. Even the prime minister of Canada had to show his identification to get in.

In the 1960s, the lodge became a Canadian Pacific Hotel known as the Chateau Montebello. Families converge in summer and winter to play on those 100 square miles. They use a curling rink in winter, a bowling alley in summer. There is hunting and fishing on the farthest corners of the estate and lots of cross country skiing.

One of the reasons I think of this when you talk about a luxurious cross country ski vacation is the memory of my first time on cross country skis. I was following a 3-year-old away from the chateau. I have an X-rated photograph of the bruise I acquired when I went down a nursery slope and fell. The 3-year-old waited patiently for me to get up. When I finished my outdoor experiments I remember how grateful I was for the beautiful gourmet dining room, where a very stuffy maître d' worked with the trained but simple local waiters and waitresses from the adjacent village of Montebello. Chateau Montebello is on the north side of the Ottawa River between Ottawa and Montreal. You can get there by train from either city — 40 miles from Ottawa or 80 miles from Montreal.



travel log
Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

Gold in state's tourist potential?

Although dark clouds have settled on Michigan's economic horizon, leading state tourism officials see a bright future for that industry, reports the January issue of Michigan Living AAA Motor News.

"The travel industry will continue to prosper during the '80s, but the problem of energy and increasing competition from other states will intensify," said Gov. William G. Milliken. "The industry must be ready to address these challenges with workable solutions, including conservation and dissemination of accurate and timely information."

With gasoline prices rising and the senior citizen population growing, Battle Creek, Flint, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, are upgrading their facilities and will play important roles in the travel picture, said Milliken.

However, with the current fiscal problems in Lansing, the Governor said less financial help will be available from government. "Tourism businesses at the local and regional levels must work more cooperatively, pooling their resources to promote their area," he said.

Development of new tourist attractions and hotels hasn't slowed despite the sluggish economy, Michigan Living points out.

"Major hotel chains continue to expand with new budget motels, middle-range and more exotic hostels in almost every area city," said Wes Tebeau, West Michigan's Tourist Association chief.

"Tourism construction in the billions of dollars is on the books already," said Sid Baker, Southeast Michigan Travel and Tourism Association head. Some of the major projects on the drawing boards or under construction include a 397-room Hyatt Regency and Auto World in Flint, a Stouffer's in Bat-

tle Creek and Space World near New Boston.

Mayor Comeman Young said that Detroit is on the way to becoming America's favorite "visitor city." He added that Detroit's reputation as a convention city is at an all-time high.

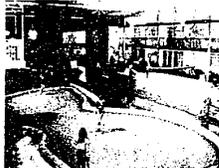
Tourism officials in northeast Lower and Upper Michigan expect to attract more campers, boaters and fisherman.

"It (tourism) will grow because we can offer what others can't — open spaces," said Bob Helwig, U.P. Travel and Recreation Association director.

Tourism is the No. 2 industry (behind automotive) in Michigan. Last year non-residents spent more than \$2 billion, and residents spent \$3 billion on Michigan vacations, according to the magazine.

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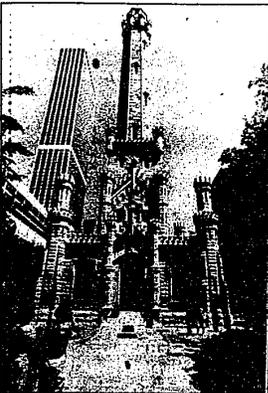


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