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ARIZONA

*Carl & Terry Pavlicek*  
35 YEARS PINNACLE AVIATION

**JANUARY 2023**

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Carefree | Cave Creek | Desert Forest Golf Club | Desert Highlands Golf Club  
Desert Mountain Country Club | Estancia | Happy Valley Ranch | Legend Trail Golf Club  
Los Gatos | Mirabel | Rancho Manana | Scottsdale National Golf Club  
Terravita Golf and Country Club | The Boulders | Troon Country Club  
Whisper Rock Golf Club | Winfield and surrounding areas



# Flight Path TO SUCCESS

Writer Rebecca L. Rhoades  
Photography by Lorelei Lazurek

Private air travel is soaring. The recent pandemic, airline staffing issues, long waits at security checkpoints and the constant threat of cancelled or changed itineraries have fueled increased interest in charters. Corporate-owned flights also are seeing record high numbers as busy executives rediscover the value of private aviation.

Just look at Scottsdale Airport, where demand for hangar space is soaring and the line for departures gets longer every day.

Curt Pavlicek, founder and co-owner with his wife, Terry, of Pinnacle Aviation, should know. For the past 35 years, Pavlicek's company has been providing high-powered clientele with a one-stop shop for all of their aviation needs, including charter services, sales and acquisitions, management, maintenance, and aviation insurance, since 1988.

He's seen the market for personal aircraft grow, he's watched the airport and its surroundings become more and more developed with aviation-related businesses, and he's sold hundreds of jets to everyone from celebrities to executives to corporations around the country.





**The biggest advantage is that people can go out and do in one day what it would take three days to do on the airlines. They can leave at 6:30 in the morning, visit four different operations across the U.S., and be back for dinner that same night.**

*Curt Pavlicek*

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Today, Pinnacle Aviation employs about 90 people, including pilots, maintenance technicians and office staff, many of whom have been with the company for years — some for more than two-and-a-half decades. And, over the years, the business has expanded to include locations in Colorado, Hawaii and, recently, California.

We recently sat down with Curt and Terry to find out how they got started, what the private aviation business is like, and what makes Pinnacle Aviation a company that has thrived in the complex and challenging aviation industry for the past 35 years.



## Curt, how did you get started in the aviation industry?

**Curt:** I grew up on a farm in North Dakota. I knew that I didn't want to be a farmer, so when I graduated from high school in 1973, I decided to get my pilot license. Shortly afterward, I got my commercial license and my instrument and twin-engine ratings.

Then a friend asked if I could fly him to a cattle auction in Nebraska. I did, and he asked, 'If I buy an airplane, would you be able to fly my family from North Dakota to Scottsdale?' The only caveat? I would have to live in Arizona for the winter. I thought, 'Wow, what a great deal!' I was young and single, and who wouldn't want to live in Scottsdale in the wintertime, right?

After buying his airplane, the owner told me that he wasn't going to use it much and that I should open a charter company. In 1980, I started Arizona Air at the Scottsdale Airport. After three years, the owner decided that he was going to sell his airplane.

Now I didn't want to go back to North Dakota because I had fallen in love with Scottsdale. Through my charter company, I had met some real estate developers who asked me to do some flying for them. So I became their corporate pilot and did that for about five years.

I hold a commercial license, and I'm rated to fly eight different types of jets, from Boeing 737s to Learjets and everything in between.





## How did you go from being a pilot to selling aircraft?

**Curt:** In 1987, there was a real estate crunch, and the developer needed to sell his aircraft. He said he'd pay me a commission if I could sell it for him. Through that process, I met people who would say, 'Hey, we don't want this aircraft, but could you find us another one?' I started looking into it, and I was able to develop a sales network. That's how I got started in the business of buying and selling aircraft in 1988.

## Where did the name Pinnacle Aviation come from?

**Curt:** A lot of people ask that question. The development firm that I worked for was called Pinnacle Peak Land Co. When the owner gave me the opportunity — he sort of pushed me out of the nest — to sell his aircraft, I needed to find a name for my business, and Pinnacle came to mind. Also, 'Pinnacle' means the height of success, so I thought it was the perfect name.



## Terry, how did you meet Curt?

**Terry:** It was a blind date. When I first met Curt, I didn't know anything about private aviation. But I learned quickly. On our third date, he asked me to join him on a flight to Boston. I'd never been on a private jet. I ended up having to be the flight attendant.

My background is in graphic design, and now I handle all the graphics, collateral and marketing for the company. The twists and turns that life takes are interesting, but we've been very fortunate. That first date was the best thing that happened to me.

## How did Pinnacle Aviation get into management, maintenance, and insurance?

**Curt:** All our businesses were developed following requests from our clients. For example, in 1996, I sold a Learjet to a company, and one day their CPA asked me if I could manage the aircraft and the hiring of pilots. So I started a management company. We also needed to do maintenance, so we hired a maintenance technician. That department started with one aircraft and now it's maintaining 26 aircraft.





For 35 years, Scottsdale-based Pinnacle Aviation — founded and co-owned by Curt Pavlicek and his wife, Terry — has been a leader in private jet charters, sales and so much more.





Then someone said, 'You have a whole fleet of aircraft, why don't you handle the insurance for them, too?' So that's how we got into the insurance business. We've basically put all five avenues of business together in one package. We're really providing everything from A to Z for our clients.

## **Who is the typical client of Pinnacle Aviation?**

**Curt:** We have a wide range of charter clients, from corporate executives to people who want to go skiing in Aspen. One day we can be flying with a celebrity, and the next day we're transporting prisoners for the U.S. Marshals Service or a heart that needs to go from Tucson to Salt Lake City for a transplant operation. You never know who's going to need to go from point A to point B, and that's what makes this business fun.

## **How many aircraft does Pinnacle Aviation own?**

**Curt:** We don't own any aircraft. All the aircraft are owned by our clients. We have the FAA charter license, and we lease the aircraft from the owners to provide charters.

## **How many of your clients charter out their aircraft and why?**

**Curt:** Seventy-five percent of our clients do that because it helps offset their costs. If an owner flies 150 hours a year, that's not enough utilization for a corporate jet. The industry standard for jet ownership is ~400 hours of flight-time a year. Also, the owner has a number of fixed costs. For example, the owner has to pay full-time pilots whether the jet flies 150 or 400 hours a year. So if the owner can charter the jet for 250 hours a year, it will reduce the fixed costs and get some return on the investment through charter revenue. It's simply good business sense.





### **We heard that you pride yourself on Pinnacle Aviation's safety rating.**

**Curt:** There are different rating companies, such as IS-BAO, Wyvern and ARG/US. We pay them to come in and audit us. They'll spend days with us scrutinizing our records and procedures and making sure we meet all their safety standards. IS-BAO is the international standard for safety. It has three stages. We have Stage 3: the highest you can get and the best in the world.

Also, our director of safety, Don Wade, has been flying for more than 50 years, and he's very well known in the industry as a national advocate of safety. Don and I want to do the best we can from a safety and operational standpoint. We're a no-excuse company.

### **Why should people choose Pinnacle Aviation for all their aircraft needs?**

**Terry:** Not every jet is the same, and neither is every jet owner. We pride ourselves on providing uncompromised personal aircraft solutions for private aircraft owners. We offer a wide variety of customized services, so when you engage with Pinnacle Aviation, you're dealing with the people who manage the planes, who maintain the planes, and hire the pilots. We have a responsibility — and we don't take it lightly — to control all of the things to meet their needs, to make sure they're safe, and to ensure we exceed their expectations.

*pinnacleaviation.com*

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