

Cedar Valley business travelers offered convenient new option

By BEN FREIN

Since the economic downturn began, organizations have cut back costs— with business travel as one of the first items on the chopping block. But when a company has out-of-state clients, travel becomes an unavoidable part of doing business. And with tight budgets, the thought of booking expensive air travel or paying employees for time on the road is enough to make most managers cringe.

According to Mapquest, driving from Waterloo to Chicago requires a nearly five-hour road trip. After booking an overnight stay in a hotel and factoring in gas, meals and mileage, the expense quickly adds up. With many regional airports offering commercial service, some businesses opt to fly to meetings. But

besides arriving two hours early to clear security and waiting for departure, most trips require a connecting flight through Minneapolis, which wastes additional time both ways.

One Cedar Falls business recognized the expense and inefficiency of travel from the Cedar Valley and began booking air charter flights to popular business destinations such as Chicago and Kansas City. Midwest Air Taxi was founded in 2004 by David LeCompte, president of Shorts Travel Company, when he got tired of driving four and a half hours to his Kansas City office. LeCompte realized light aircraft charter flights would not only be more affordable and efficient than same-day commercial flights, but would also allow greater productivity and time with his family.

“By the time I made it home, I was tired, had missed dinner, and the kids were already in bed,” LeCompte said. “I knew there had to be a market for business-people like me who had better things to do with their time.”

Recently, Midwest Air Taxi has begun booking nonstop flights for Livingston Aviation to Chicago and Kansas City.

Midwest Air Taxi also books charter flights for Livingston Aviation to more than 458 airports in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, North Dakota and Nebraska. FAA commercially certified pilots fly a prop-driven Cirrus SR22, which can seat three passengers in addition to the pilot. But this is no ordinary leisure plane: The craft features advanced aeronautics necessary for commercial flight, such

as collision avoidance, weather and navigation radars. The plane also boasts a safety feature that no commercial airline can match — a parachute for the entire plane, which returns the craft safely to the ground in case of a rare mechanical emergency. LeCompte brought me on as co-owner in 2006.

It is my opinion that the service's best features is convenience. Most airlines make you pay to check your bags, clear security and wait for your flights to board. These planes are waiting to take off as soon as you arrive with no security clearance. And we never tell you to turn off your electronic devices. Our cabin features leather interior, climate control and is all about the comfort and productivity of our clients.

Dan Leese, president and co-

founder of 585 wine partners of Sonoma, California booked a flight during a recent speaking engagement at the University of Northern Iowa.

“The trip was incredible,” Leese said. “No security lines, no baggage check, no usual travel hassles. Beautiful, comfortable flight from point to point. I would definitely book with Midwest again.”

Businesses and individuals interested in booking a flight with Midwest Air Taxi or for more information can visit www.mwairtaxi.com or call 888-373-7044. Midwest Air Taxi books flights for Livingston Aviation, a FAA registered part 135 operator.

Ben Frein is chief executive officer of Midwest Air Taxi. Contact him at (888) 373-7044 or www.mwAirTaxi.com.