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Piper Rejuvenated At Oshkosh!



PiperJet

OSHKOSH, WIS. – While some aircraft manufacturers are going out of business, and others are considering more cutbacks, Piper Aircraft, Inc., is full steam ahead. The company was bought by “Imprimis” earlier this year. Imprimis is a corporate finance and investment management firm that operates from offices in Bangkok, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam. While the president and CEO of Piper at the time, Jim Bass, made the deal happen and is highly respected in the industry, he was replaced in June 2009

by other Piper veterans.

Midwest Flyer Magazine met with Piper’s Bob Kromer, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, during EAA AirVenture-Oshkosh, July 29, 2009, to discuss the changes in ownership and management, and how this would affect the company’s future.

Kromer joined Piper in 2006. He came to Piper from Sino Swearingen Aircraft Company in San Antonio, Texas, where he was Vice President of Sales and Marketing, responsible for all the sales and marketing activities

of the SJ30 business jet. Prior to that, Kromer was Senior Manager of Flight Test and Flight Operations at Sino Swearingen, Executive Director of the Mooney Aircraft Pilots Association, and Executive Vice President and General Manager of Mooney Aircraft Corporation. Kromer graduated from Texas A & M University with a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering and is a commercial, multiengine and instrument-rated pilot.

The first question we asked Bob Kromer was who is running Piper nowadays, and what’s their aviation background.

The Chairman and CEO of Imprimis is Steven Burger, who is a U.S. educated Indonesian who lives in Singapore with his wife and three children. Burger is not a pilot, but was at Oshkosh this year for the first time to get a feel for those of us who are. Burger selected the best at Piper to steer the company into the future, rather than recruit people outside the company.

Kevin Gould was promoted to the position of Chief Executive Officer. Gould joined Piper in 2005 as Vice President of Operations. Since arriving at Piper, Gould has overhauled the company’s manufacturing operations to meet production schedule commitments, while improving both cost and quality performance. Previously he served as Senior Vice President of Operations at Adam Aircraft Industries in Denver, Colorado, where he set up the company’s manufacturing and quality organizations in preparation for commercial production of its A500 aircraft. Gould spent 12 years at Boeing in various operational roles within the company’s commercial aerospace business.

Gould holds an M.B.A from Harvard Business School, a Juris Doctorate from the University of Southern California School of Law, and a B.A. from Washington State University. He is a private pilot.

John Becker, who joined Piper in 1989, was promoted to President.

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Becker has successfully implemented numerous projects including development of the Meridian (Piper's flagship, turboprop aircraft), the Seneca V (Piper's premier twin-engine aircraft), two models of the Saratoga (Piper's midlevel, performance aircraft), and the Archer and Warrior II (Piper's entry-level aircraft). In his capacity as Vice President of Engineering – and now as President – Becker leads the team responsible for the ongoing design and development of the "PiperJet." Prior to joining Piper, Becker worked with Bombardier Learjet as a powerplant engineer/consultant on the Learjet Model 31A, Model 45 and Model 60.

Becker has a B.S. in Aviation Technology from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, an M.B.A. from the Florida Institute of Technology, and a Master Certification in Program Management from George Washington University. He is an instrument-rated commercial pilot and an airframe and powerplant mechanic. Additionally, Becker has served as a Designated Engineering Representative for the FAA.

Kromer told *Midwest Flyer Magazine* that Piper now has the financial backing it was lacking, and continuity in leadership, to go forward with the PiperJet program, and to rejuvenate other aircraft programs, such as the Piper Warrior and Archer. Kromer said that the "Warrior" remains a popular model at aviation colleges and universities because of its economical 160 hp Lycoming engine, and the Archer is a deluxe single-engine model with its 180 hp Lycoming with all of the features pilots come to expect in a modern aircraft, including the Garmin G600, a synthetic vision system (SVS), dual WAAS, S-TEC 55 autopilot, leather upholstery, and air conditioning for \$300,000. The Warrior also comes equipped with the Garmin G600. Kromer says that it is not unusual for a flight school to operate a Warrior for 10,000 hours before replacing it because of their reliability and



(L/R) Bob Kromer, Vice President of Sales & Marketing for Piper Aircraft, Inc. with John Lowe, President & CEO of Des Moines Flying Service and Chicago Piper, at EAA AirVenture-Oshkosh.

economy.

The Malibu and Meridian remain top sellers at Piper. Kromer expects Piper to return to a full production line soon. The company is building a separate building for the PiperJet assembly line (www.piper.com). The PiperJet was featured in the fly-by demonstrations at Oshkosh, and was being flown by Piper test pilot Dave Schwartz.

Meeting with us was John Lowe, President and CEO of Des Moines Flying Service (DMFS) and Chicago Piper. Des Moines Flying Service has

been associated with Piper Aircraft since 1937, and has sold literally thousands of new and used Pipers and other makes all over the world (www.dmfs.com). Chicago Piper was established to specifically serve the greater Chicago market. Between the two companies, they serve the states of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and northern Illinois. In addition, ASI Jet Center at Flying Cloud Airport, Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is DMFS's Piper sales and service affiliate serving the Twin Cities (www.asijetcenter.com). □

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