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Flying For a Cause

Part 1: The "Why" of Charitable Flying

by Joe Ratterman



If you're like many *Twin & Turbine* readers, the path to the left seat of your cabin-class aircraft has been a rewarding one. You've been blessed with a successful career, financial security and a fulfilling lifestyle. Flying most likely played a central role in your professional and personal success, allowing you to manage your schedule more efficiently, be more responsive to clients, and generally enhance the quality of your life. With the move into cabin-class turbine equipment, you now have a time machine at your disposal, What used to be 2-3 day business trips are now often single-day ventures, bringing you home in time for dinner instead of being stuck in an airport or hotel far away from your family.



Joe and Sandy Ratterman (left) with their first Angel Flight Central passengers.



Sometimes the act of giving back comes in small packages. This Angel Flight passenger discovered the fun of flight while receiving transportation on Joe's Citation Mustang.

If you're like me, you want to pay it forward. You want your good fortune to benefit those who need it most. If it could be combined with flying, all the better.

My goal in writing a series on charitable flying is simple: to encourage more cabin-class and turbine aircraft pilots to consider flying for charitable organizations, even if it is just a few times each year. I'm not going to promote any one organization over any of the others. Rather, I simply hope that you will come away with a curiosity and desire to connect with at least one of the many charitable flight organizations that might fit your passion for helping others. I'll provide a list of organizations in the final installment of this series.

This month I'll cover the "why" of flying for charitable flight organizations. In the next installment, I'll cover the "how," and after that I'll wrap it up with a final installment on the "who" in charitable flying.

Before I make a case for why YOU should explore becoming a volunteer pilot for one of these organizations, indulge me for a moment as I tell you how I got into charitable flying for Angel Flight Central.

As a newly minted private pilot in the summer of 2009, I rolled directly into training for my Instrument rating. As I contemplated all the freedom that seemed to come from being a pilot, I came across a Saratoga TC II for sale at my local airport. This was an amazing machine with not too many hours and a beautiful Garmin G1000 avionics package. That seemed like the

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perfect airplane for me and I quickly learned all I could about what airplane ownership might mean for our family.

As I explored the possibility of buying this awesome flying machine, the seller's broker told me that it was used frequently by the current owner to fly sick people to their medical treatment, for an organization called Angel Flight Central. **The idea of using an airplane to help others had never occurred to me before, but it seemed like a really cool way to give back to others.** I told myself that if I was lucky enough to actually own an airplane, and hopefully this one, that I would continue that tradition of using it to help others as well.

My wife and I did buy that airplane, but we never actually flew an Angel Flight mission in it. We only owned the airplane for three months before we realized that we needed a more capable airplane, a Piper Meridian, which we purchased in December 2009. It was in the Meridian that I finally accumulated the 500 hours of flight time needed to qualify as an Angel Flight Central pilot.

The promise I made to myself to use our airplane to help others never faded, and we've been using our airplane for Angel Flight missions on a monthly basis ever since. To date, my wife and I have flown more than 100 Angel Flight Central missions; around 20 of those in the Piper Meridian and the rest of them have been in our Cessna Citation Mustang, which we purchased in December 2012. We typically see between 10 and 20 percent of our logbook hours each year dedicated to flying charitable missions.



(Standing rear) Joe and Sandy Ratterman's Angel Flight mission for this family is an example of how some trips couldn't be practically made in anything but a private jet.

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Many of the Angel Flight missions that Joe and Sandy fly are children. Providing transportation to specialized medical centers in other cities is a tremendous benefit for families going through some of the most difficult times of their lives.



The reason I wanted to share our story is two-fold: First, it goes to the heart of why pilots use their airplane to help others. It's a really cool way to give back out of the abundance of blessings we have been given as pilots and aircraft owners. And second, to highlight that these missions aren't just

for pilots of small piston aircraft, but rather, charitable flights make just as much sense, if not more, for owners and operators of more capable and more expensive turbine aircraft. By the way, if you are reading this article, that's probably you!

Many of the missions we have completed in our Mustang could not have been practically flown in smaller piston airplanes. I'll get to more of that in the third installment when I talk about the "who" of charitable flying. For now, let me share five reasons "why" you might want to look into becoming a volunteer pilot.

Reason 1: The people you will help are truly in need and often have no other practical way to keep up with the repeated trips for treatment and checkups. The individuals that we fly are going through a really difficult time in their life, and the relief that we provide by flying them in a private plane can be huge. Typically the treatment they are getting is far away and can take a big toll on them. So, making the trip to and from these medical centers as comfortable and stress-free as possible makes a big difference (more than you may realize).

Reason 2: Pilots like to fly, at least that's what I've heard anyway. These missions are a great reason fly and bring real purpose to your trips. If you aren't getting as many hours as you want in your logbook each year, a few

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charitable trips can be a nice way to keep you in the air.

Reason 3: Flying passengers, especially when they aren't your friends or colleagues, can really up your game! There is something about having precious cargo in the airplane that will force you to tighten up your tolerances, smooth out those turns, and grease those landings. When you fly people that you just met on the day of the trip, it feels a bit like flying a commercial airplane, with people in the back that are counting on you to safely transport them from point A to point B. "Pilot in Command" and "Captain" take on a whole new level of reality on these flights, and that tends to make us better pilots.

Reason 4: Depending on your specific tax situation, and how you account for the operation of your airplane, it is possible that you may be able to deduct some or all of the direct operating expenses associated with charitable flights. None of the charitable organizations provide expense or fuel reimbursement for their flights, but some of that expense can likely be reported as a charitable donation on your taxes each year. I recommend that you check with a tax professional to determine if there would be a tax advantage for your specific situation.

Reason 5: This cannot be overstated: It's a great way to give back — if you are in to that kind of thing.

Next month I'll cover some of the logistics and operational aspects of charitable flying, and you'll see that it's easier than you might have thought to incorporate charitable flying into your schedule. **T&T**

Joe Ratterman is an ATP pilot, type-rated in the Cessna Citation Mustang C510, with 2,500-plus hours in his logbook. Joe retired from a successful corporate executive career in 2015 and now flies as a professional charter pilot for Kansas City Aviation Company (KCAC) based in Overland Park, Kansas. He is also the current board chairman/president for Angel Flight Central.

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