

Bedford Minuteman



By Matthew Modoono/Staff photographer

Guy Harkless (left) talks with Linear Air Vice President and CFO Welles Hatch, outside the recently acquired Eclipse 500 V...

Look, it's a bird, no, a jet plane

By Patrick Ball, Staff writer

Thu Dec 06, 2007

Flying 400 miles per hour at an elevation of 41,000 feet in a Very Light Jet no bigger than a bass boat may sound more scary than chic, but Bill Herp, founder and CEO of Linear Air, a Concord-based air-taxi service, is counting on these little jets to be the next big thing.

Herp believes the VLJ will revolutionize and democratize the private air travel industry, by enabling cheaper and quicker point-to-point transportation. "It's the engines. The power plants are the real technological achievements," he said.

Linear Air last Thursday unveiled the Eclipse 500 Very Light Jet (VLJ) at Hanscom Field, in front of select customers and a few local dignitaries. By adding the VLJ to its fleet of Cessna Grand Caravans, Linear Air became the "first and only" company offering VLJ service to the northeast, according to company officials.

When Herp started Linear Air in 2004, it was with the specific intention of operating the VLJ when they came onto the market. In fact, they took delivery of the second jet last Friday, and plan to have 10 by the end of 2008, and 300 by the end of 2012.

The cutting-edge technology that allows the VLJ's engine to be half the size of larger jets, while retaining their capabilities, will cut in half the cost of personal jet travel, according to Herp.

He said a regional daytrip of 300 to 500 miles on the VLJ would be roughly equal to the cost of three, last-minute, round-trip coach tickets, and approximately half the price of a trip on Linear Air's former fleet of Cessnas. It costs about the same per-mile amount to operate the VLJ as it does a Cessna, but the VLJ goes twice as fast, Herp said.

As a Lexington resident doing business in Concord, Herp is sympathetic to area residents' concern about the airport affecting quality of life in terms of the environment and noise signature. So, he is pleased that the VLJ is the "most environmentally friendly and quietest jet in the history of commercial aviation."

"This aircraft is first in its class," said Barbara Patzner, airport director for MassPort. "It flies faster – at jet speed – and you're able to do your business and get back."

Patzner has become familiar with Linear Air, which has been based at Hanscom for several years. "They wanted to be ahead of the curve, and they really are," Patzner said.

Linear Air pilots Steve Walsh and Dana Dellacroce said the plane is great, and certainly a pilot's airplane.

The VLJ's systems and technology make things easier for the pilot, and the jet is extremely comfortable for passengers and pilots alike, they said.

"There is nothing comparable to this airplane," said Walsh, who believes this "groundbreaking plane" is going to "change how people travel."

Herp said news of Linear Air's incorporation of the VLJ has had a perceptible impact on customer demand already. Only 1,000 of the 12,000 listed customers have flown on one of the Cessnas, and last week they received their highest ever number of requests for quotes, Herp said.

Customer Doug Barth said Herp's plan to eventually maintain a fleet of VLJs is "one of the reasons I started with Linear Air."

Barth, who owns a Sudbury-based tech-marketing company, believes VLJs are the "future" of commercial aviation, because the current system is "broken," and point-to-point travel should have offered all along. "Right now, it's easier for me to visit customers in San Francisco than New Jersey," Barth said. "It's also really sexy to fly in something like this. I feel a lot more special than being put into a caravan."

According to a recent press release, Linear Air has aircraft based at Hanscom Field outside Boston, Westchester County Airport in White Plains, N.Y., Manassas Regional Airport in Manassas, Va. and seasonally in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The company provides on-demand air taxi service to more than 500 cities in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Canada and Caribbean. On summer weekends, the company offers per-seat scheduled charter service to Nantucket from Hanscom Field outside Boston and Teterboro Airport outside

New York City, and from the Manassas Regional Airport in Manassas, Va. near D.C. to the Dare County Regional Airport in Manteo, N.C. in the Carolina Outer Banks.

Linear Air maintains a Gold safety rating from ARG/US, the leading independent safety auditor in the aviation industry. For more information about Linear Air or to book a flight, visit www.linearair.com or call 781-860-9696 or 1-877-2-LINEAR.