

The Boston Globe

CAMPUS INSIDER

Air taxi firm gets boost from families bound for N.E. college tours

May 18, 2008

Chartered jets evoke images of big-wig executives poring over contracts and business plans. But a Concord-based air taxi company is finding that a growing number of its clients are wealthy families bound for visits to New England colleges. Linear Air, a charter service that flies out of Hanscom Field, has seen a surge in the number of families touring schools in the region this spring as students make their final decisions.

Inquiries into college tours have climbed 50 percent this spring, the company said. Private trips to colleges far from commercial airports, such as Colby and Middlebury colleges, are particularly popular, sparing the family a lengthy drive, the cost of a hotel room, and the host of hassles that come with flying commercial. Many families visit multiple colleges in a day or weekend.

"It's a great way for parents to squeeze in a lot in a short time," said Bill Herp, the company's president and chief executive officer. "A lot of parents are looking to charter services to cover more ground."

The company's newest aircraft, the Eclipse, a light twin-engine jet that can travel about 800 miles, carries three passengers and the fares are roughly half those of a larger charter aircraft.

"It's car service with wings," he said. Still, the service has an exclusive clientele. A flight from Hanscom to Dartmouth on the Eclipse costs \$3,100, and to Colby College costs \$3,800, an expense that the most generous financial aid package is unlikely to cover.

Support for UMass student: Nearly 2,000 students and faculty at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst have signed a petition urging prosecutors to reconsider aggravated assault charges filed against former student Jason Vassell following a racial altercation on campus in February.

The Committee for Justice for Jason Vassell sent the petition last week to Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel, whose office is handling the case. The petition denounced the charges as "excessive" given that Vassell was apparently the victim of an unprovoked attack in his dormitory, and called on Scheibel to "seriously and carefully" reevaluate the charges.

Committee members contend that Vassell, accused of stabbing two intruders who attacked him after smashing his dorm window and uttering a racial slur, was defending himself and should face less serious charges. Vassell, 23, who is black, allegedly stabbed Jonathan Bowes, 20, and Jonathan Bosse, 19, both of whom are white, several times with a small knife. He suffered a concussion and broken nose in the fight.

"We cannot stand by idly while a student, by all accounts an outstanding member of our community, is unfairly threatened with years in prison," said Max Page, a UMass-Amherst professor.

The group is also raising money for Vassell's legal costs.

Neither of the two men who allegedly attacked Vassell attend UMass-Amherst. Bowes faces hate crimes and disorderly conduct charges, while Bosse has not been charged.

Vassell, who had no prior criminal record, has withdrawn from school. He has pleaded innocent.

Questions at Simmons: When Simmons College announced April 24 that president Susan Scrimshaw was stepping down at the end of the semester, trustees said they were pleased with her performance and surprised by her departure. And Scrimshaw, who will leave after less than two years as head of the Fenway college, said she was leaving for an unspecified position in the international health field.

But many faculty and students say they remained unconvinced, and speculation on campus is rampant over the circumstances surrounding her departure.

The abrupt timing of the announcement suggested she was pushed out because the board was not happy with her performance, several professors and students privately told the Globe last week. In a recent editorial, *The Simmons Voice*, the student newspaper, accused trustees of "fabricating lies" about Scrimshaw's departure.

Scrimshaw will be replaced by Helen Drinan, chairwoman of the Simmons board of trustees, who will take the job on an interim basis but has pledged to serve at least two years, an unusually long stint for an interim president.

Scrimshaw declined a request for an interview and referred to her previous letter to the Simmons community, in which she said she was pursuing opportunities to promote "public health on the international level and to undertake a specific consulting assignment."