



Palm Beach Helicopters

Offering More Than Instruction

By Elizabeth Partridge

Palm Beach, Florida, is a location people flock to for vacations. The 16 miles of pristine beaches are only one of the reasons. The beautiful weather and the numerous attractions appeal to many different people, and that is why Randy Rowles chose this town as home base for his helicopter training campus. Rowles and his wife Samantha founded Palm Beach Helicopters in 2001. Rowles felt that his own experience with helicopter instruction never addressed all of his needs as a student. “He never found a facility that met all of his needs or his expectations of customer service, so he opened his own flight training academy,” explains Debbie Sparks, president of Palm Beach Helicopters.

Rowles developed the ProPILOT Program, which is geared towards training students to become professional pilots. It covers five licenses/ratings: Private, Commercial, Instrument, Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) and CFI with instrument rating. Even though many students are not interested in becoming a CFI, the ProPILOT Program is beneficial to anyone hoping to enter the commercial world. The 200 hours earned during training, coupled with hour-building as an instructor, enables the student to meet the 1,000-hour insurance requirement while earning a paycheck, not to mention gaining invaluable experience.

This operation is a win-win situation for both Palm Beach Helicopters and its students. “We literally groom every student to come work for us,” Sparks says. “Because we see them on a daily basis, we know their personality, their talents and aspirations. They usually stay with us for a year, and then we assist them to secure employment.” Employment opportunities are numerous in the helicopter world. Students can move on to work in the petroleum industry, EMS, firefighting, law enforcement, tourism, load lifting – any number of positions. “The industry is booming,” says Sparks. “Situations like Hurricane Katrina

even further emphasized the importance of our industry; numerous victims were located only as a result of the use of helicopters.”

Students come to Palm Beach Helicopters knowing that they want to fly helicopters but are unsure how to get where they want to go. Part of the orientation now includes the question, “What segment of the industry appeals to you: Law Enforcement, Firefighting, EMS or Tourism?” “Pretty much everybody has an idea when they walk in the door what their dream job is. It’s not just our goal or job to train them – it’s our desire to get them where they want to go,” explains Sparks.

Students are trained in Robinson R22 and R44 piston-powered ships. While the turbine ships are the workhorses of the industry, it is not always cost effective for training. One of the aspects that distinguishes Palm Beach Helicopters from other schools is their affiliation with a charter company, Aircoastal Helicopters. Aircoastal Helicopters is a 135-charter operation founded by Dan Crowe in 1981. Dan implemented a program to allow students and instructors to fly when a co-pilot seat is available. This allows for hands on experience with a turbine aircraft.

Another valuable asset to Palm Beach Helicopters is that they are an authorized Robinson Service Center. “Whether maintenance is scheduled or unscheduled, it is handled right here, right now keeping our schedule fluid,” says Sparks. “Every business has its own little niche,” says Sparks. “We happen to have two. Our staff and students are considered family, and our commitment to safety and quality training is served fresh daily.” ■

For more information, visit www.palmbeachhelicopters.com or call 561-304-1491.