

INVESTOR MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

FLIGHT OPTIONS ON THE RADAR OF CLEVELAND'S CIVIC COMMUNITY

COMPANY TAKES PRIDE IN CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY BUT IS CURRENTLY IN THE FIGHT TO STAY IN CLEVELAND, ASKING FOR MUCH-NEEDED RENOVATIONS TO THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY AIRPORT

BY ▶ AMANDA MARKO

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of Flight Options. In that time, as you can imagine, the company has experienced its ups and downs.

Founded in Cleveland, the company was nationally recognized for its incredible growth in the late 1990s, but that was soon followed by a period of revenue loss. But recently, a new leadership team has revived the company and has successfully established Flight Options as a leader and innovator in the private aviation industry.

Although civic responsibility was on the minds of the Flight Options leadership team from the beginning, they first had to ensure they were in the black. "In the first 18 months, civic involvement for us was making sure Flight Options did not perish," explains Michael Scheeringa, chief executive officer of Flight Options. "We had a responsibility to maintain a viable business that would provide a livelihood to 550 Clevelanders."

Now, with a corporate restructuring that included installing a modern accounting system to replace the 250 spread sheets previously used, Flight



THE COMMAND CENTER FOR FLIGHT OPTIONS' 130 AIRCRAFT FLEET AT THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY AIRPORT IN RICHMOND HEIGHTS.

Options looked outward to repair damage to its image, grow the business, educate Cleveland about Flight Options, and instill civic pride in its employees. "We started by reaching out and saying that we have a new story to tell," says Scheeringa.

Community involvement for Flight Options means winter coat drives and walkathons. It means that the senior leadership is committed to organizations like Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio, Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, and The Ronald McDonald House. And, since Flight Options is an Investor-level member in the Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP), together they are working to tackle Flight Option's next big challenge: modernizing the Cuyahoga County Airport.

"Airports can drive local economic development," Scheeringa says emphatically. But after years of neglect, the Cuyahoga County Airport could soon be unusable as a long-term airport

maintenance hub by Flight Options if repairs are not made. During the winter of 2004-2005, the airport's runway was closed for 55 days because of weather and poor maintenance.

"This is an economic development issue and it's a business retention issue," said Carol Caruso, GCP senior vice president of advocacy. The GCP is working with public officials to secure the federal, state and local funds required to upgrade the facilities and spur economic growth at the airport. "Flight Options has a \$71 million economic impact on the Cleveland economy and the airport itself has the potential to be an even greater economic development engine," she said.

If a resolution cannot be found, the option of abandoning Cleveland exists. However, Scheeringa feels a commitment to Cleveland. He says, "Our headquarters could be anywhere in the U.S, but we have a 550-person team that call Cleveland home, and we want them to continue calling Cleveland home." <<

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