

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Kenn Ricci, Founder and Principal of Directional Aviation is moving to make a truly global offering of a suite of private jet travel access solutions.

BY SYLVIE PERON



“As a long-time pilot myself, I am proud to be able to support Able Flight, which teaches those with disabilities to fly, instilling confidence and offering them the possibility of a career in aviation.”

KENN RICCI

K

Kenneth C “Kenn” Ricci has spent more than 30 years developing innovative services in the aviation industry. He is the principal of Directional Aviation, headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, which operates a family of private aviation travel providers within its OneSky portfolio, including shared aircraft ownership leader Flexjet, Sentient Jet with expertise in jet card offerings and digital on-demand charter broker Skyjet. Directional also owns business jet remanufacturer Nextant Aerospace and maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) entities N1 Engines and Constant Aviation. In September of 2018, Directional Aviation acquired UK-based PrivateFly, making it a part of their OneSky suite of aircraft access solutions. The online booking platform will join forces with OneSky’s existing brokerage Skyjet, to create one of the world’s largest digital platforms for on-demand private jet charter.

PRIVATEFLY

“PrivateFly’s co-founders, Adam Twidell and Carol Cork, are true innovators who recognised early on how important mobile capabilities and on-demand digital bookings are in the charter space, and they will continue to play a critical role in the company’s future,” said Kenn Ricci.

As the first business model to offer digitally-enabled private jet booking end-to-end when it launched in 2008, PrivateFly was initially UK-focused and has since developed multiple channels and customer bases worldwide. With a strong foothold in the US, Skyjet offers one of the most highly downloaded private jet booking apps.

Twidell and Cork will lead the combined entity, which will operate offices in both the United States and Europe. They intend to leverage the extensive infrastructure and assets available within the OneSky family of brands, which also includes Sentient Jet and Flexjet.

“Carol and I are both very excited to be taking PrivateFly into this next phase of our story,” Adam Twidell told *Altitudes*. “By joining Directional Aviation’s OneSky portfolio, we are joining forces with a much bigger aviation group, with the ability to offer our customers, partners and operators more opportunities and the benefits of our increased buying power.”

“Initially Skyjet and PrivateFly will continue ▶



67

PrivateFly’s co-founders, Adam Twidell and Carol Cork: OneSky portfolio within Directional Aviation includes digital charter providers PrivateFly and Skyjet, jet card Sentient Jet and fractional ownership Flexjet.





68

top: the Ricci family at Purdue Able Flight aircraft donation.
bottom: Ricci and Flexjet CEO Mike Silvestro at a Gulfstream G650 delivery in October 2017.



► under their existing brand names and identities. Both companies have individual strengths, so we are working carefully on a strategy to combine the best of both,” continues Twidell.

“One of the benefits for customers within the OneSky group will be greater access to the whole spectrum of private air travel options, across different geographies. So this forms part of the vision to expand that by harnessing our group synergies. We’re all really excited about this transaction and the opportunities it brings for our customers, industry partners and the businesses within the OneSky portfolio.”

A FASCINATING BACKGROUND

Kenn Ricci was born in 1956 in Cleveland, Ohio and grew up in a nearby suburb. In 1974 he enrolled in the University of Notre Dame and enlisted in its Air Force ROTC program. He made his first solo flight in 1977, earned his private and commercial pilot license and became a flight instructor, graduating from Notre Dame with an accounting degree. He would later (1986) get a law degree from Cleveland Marshall School of Law.

In 1981, he acquired Corporate Wings, an aircraft management and charter operation company, and a few years later began acquiring fixed-based operations (FBOs), thus expanding the company’s business beyond Cleveland. During the late ’80s and early ’90s he personally flew 600-700 hours per year as a pilot of Gulfstream G2 and Citation Jets, including concert tours and political campaigns. He began flying Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton during his first presidential campaign, and served as his pilot until Clinton’s 1993 inauguration as President.

In 1998, he founded Flight Options, selling fractional shares in used aircraft.

In 2003, Directional Aviation Capital was established, which today has 2,200 employees, more than US\$1.5 billion in annual revenue and operations in over 70 countries.

In 2006, Ricci authored ‘Management by Trust’, which the New York Times Book Review called “a landmark success formula for corporate America”.

In 2007 he founded Nextant Aerospace, specializing in the remanufacturing of business jets; and Constant Aviation, a leading and rapidly expanding MRO; followed two years later by the creation of Sojourn Aviation, an independent aircraft sales company.

In 2012, Ricci acquired Sentient Jet, a pioneer in jet card private aviation access services. The following year, shared ownership leader Flexjet was acquired from Bombardier, which Ricci combined with Flight Options under the Flexjet banner. That same year, he co-founded N1 Engines in partnership with B&G Aviation. The firm provides turbine engines and engine parts. That year also marked the entry into service of the Nextant 400XTi, the next generation of the world’s first remanufactured business jet, which had become a leading light jet solution in North America and Europe since receiving FAA and EASA certification just three years prior.

In 2016, Flexjet acquired UK-based FlairJet, expanding Flexjet’s operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. That same year, the turboprop Nextant G90XT achieved certification. Finally, in September 2018, PrivateFly joined Directional’s OneSky family of flight providers.

PHILANTHROPY

Family is everything to Kenn Ricci, a dynamic philanthropist with a lifelong passion for championing the causes of underdogs. His wife Pamela, daughter Elizabeth, sons Kennedy and Austin and his mother Mary support him in his journey.

In October of 2017, Ricci and his wife announced a US\$100 million dollar unrestricted gift to Kenn’s alma mater, The University of Notre Dame, via a giving and business succession model he developed called a Philanthropic Succession Partnership. This is the single largest unrestricted gift ever committed to the university, which ►

“With the combination of PrivateFly and Skyjet, we are realising the digital part of OneSky’s vision in the on-demand charter space. Nobody provides instant private jet travel at the touch of a button with this degree of expertise.”

ANDREW COLLINS, PRESIDENT OF SKYJET & SENTIENT JET



71

philanthropy: Pamela and Kenneth Ricci at Notre Dame University. The couple shares a passion for championing the causes of underdogs.

“PrivateFly is joining forces with Skyjet, OneSky’s existing charter broker; a company that shares our commitment to digital innovation.”

ADAM TWIDELL

► will help to enhance access to higher education for generations of students.

Furthermore, through the Ricci Family Foundation’s support of the Able Flight program at the Purdue Polytechnic Institute, people with disabilities, many of them military veterans, have the ability to challenge themselves through flight training via a specially equipped Sky Arrow L600 sport plane, which can be flown without pedals and with hands only, and offers access to aviation career training.

Kenn Ricci also upholds an unwavering commitment to championing fundraising and research to support the treatment, and development of a cure for Cystic Fibrosis, which today affects 30,000 children and adults in the US. His pioneering vision has led him to create the Directional Aviation family of companies, which has become a multi-billion dollar world-leader in business aviation. And to quote Adam Twidell commenting on the recent acquisition of PrivateFly: “This is just the beginning!” 🚀

