

BEACON

fall 2004

PERSONALITY PROFILE



You should ask him – ask “Red” Johnson what wristwatch he likes to wear. If you’re lucky, he’ll tell you a fascinating tapestry of stories that weave together his wristwatch, piloting a B-17 Flying Fortress over World War II Germany and the earliest days of Addison Airport.

James W. “Red” Johnson says, “I never thought I’d be crazy enough to fly a light airplane.” After all, he started out flying one of the toughest four-engine bombers of all time, the B-17 Flying Fortress. Now with more than 5,000 hours in light airplanes (and 3,000 in military craft), Johnson says, “I’m dreaming to be the oldest pilot at Addison Airport ever.” At 83, he can probably lay claim to that title because he’s still flying the twin-engine Cessna 421 that he bought new in 1978, and he doesn’t appear anywhere near ready to relinquish the controls.

Red Johnson has been flying out of ADS since 1969 when he started flying a Cessna 310 – complete with 8-track tape player – to travel around his 10-state sales territory creating what *D Magazine* later dubbed “the Texas Timex” phenomenon.

Ah, but to make this fascinating tale fit into a newsletter, we’ll only be able to whet your appetite. You’ll have to ask Red for more. It’ll be well worth it!

Born in Lancaster, raised in Dallas from age 9, Johnson graduated from Sunset High School and promptly got a job as a runner at Linz Jewelers in downtown Dallas making \$10 a week. “That was great! Seven cents would take me to town, and seven cents would take me back on the streetcar.”

In the fall of 1941, he enrolled in a YMCA class that promised to teach young men the five basic sciences needed to qualify for the U.S. Army Air Corps. Johnson says he stuck with the class because he enjoyed the socializing afterwards with the instructors and other students. Then came Dec. 7, 1941 – the attack on Pearl Harbor. The following month, Johnson took an all-day test at the post office. “I was gone the next day.” That was the beginning of a flying career that spanned 23 years in the U.S. Army Air Corps and the U.S. Air Force Reserve. He’s still flying in 2004.

Johnson earned his first wings at Ellington Army Airfield in Houston, Class 42-I. At the end of 1942, after the holidays, he and his newly formed air crew got their

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North Dallas Aviation

Follow the red arrow to the right at the end of Jimmy Doolittle Drive, and you’ll find one of Addison Airport’s newest tenants, North Dallas Aviation, tucked into a small suite of offices in the side of the hangar. But then Keith Dickerson and his employees don’t need a large suite of fancy offices because they’re usually out flying.

Dickerson started North Dallas Aviation three years ago at McKinney Municipal Airport but moved his company to Addison Airport last spring. “Addison Airport is just more convenient for our passengers, most of whom are here in the north Dallas area,” says Dickerson, president of NDA. “We started in McKinney with one plane, now we have three, and soon we’ll have a fourth. The majority of our maintenance is done here at ADS, and we were shuttling back and forth between Addison and McKinney, and shuttling here to pick up passengers. That didn’t make sense, so we moved here.”

“Addison Airport has a more corporate feel with the FAA tower and the quality of services here. McKinney is great but it is still too far from our customer base,” Dickerson adds. “Some people told us we’d wait in line here to take

off, but we haven’t waited in line but two or three times. The tower does a great job of getting us in and out. Alvin DeVane, the tower chief, and his team do a wonderful job of controlling the airplanes.”



NDA’s business is primarily passenger charter service for small and mid-size companies. They currently fly a Cessna Citation II, a King Air B200 and a King Air B100, and will be adding a fourth aircraft soon. The company has four full-time pilots and three part-time pilots. “We offer one-on-one, personal service,” explains

Dickerson. “Our passenger charter service is designed for corporate travelers who want out-and-back in a day service. The King Airs give us very comfortable, cost-effective statewide or regional reach. The Citation reaches out to almost either coast. Our next aircraft will be a mid-size jet for the longer range trips.”

NDA’s aircraft are managed under lease agreements with private owners. “We take care of everything involved in owning an airplane,” says Dickerson, “the crewing, maintenance – everything. We make it easy and affordable to own a quality plane. Our owners trust us to manage

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FLY-IN

Gaston's White River Resort

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Fly-in fly fishing at its best and most convenient – that’s Gaston’s White River Resort in northern Arkansas. Established in 1958, Gaston’s has been run by the Gaston family for 46 years and now encompasses over 400 acres with two miles of frontage on the beautiful White River, one of the nation’s top trout-fishing havens.

Renowned fly fishing guide and teacher Hank Wilson will have you making beautiful casts on the river after just a



few short hours of instruction. The resort has 70 boats, which are available for use on the river. You can rent a boat on your own (ask about bringing your own small motor) or you can hire one of the professional guides who can show you where the trophy-size brown trout like to hang out.

Gaston’s 3,200-foot Bermuda turf airstrip (identifier 3MO, runway 6/24) sets you down right next to the resort. Park, tie down (no fees) and head for the river. The airfield is open to all flyers even if you’re not staying there. Many fly in for breakfast, lunch or just to enjoy the river view.

The resort sports 79 riverside cottages ranging from two double beds and bath to a two-story lodge with 10 private bedrooms. A new state-of-the-art phone system provides phones with data ports in each cottage. If you can’t leave work behind, there’s a comfortable conference center that can accommodate 125 people, complete with catering by the resort’s restaurant.

For more information, visit www.gastons.com. For reservations, call 870-431-5202.

THREE DOTS

... MILLION AIR DALLAS ...

Million Air Dallas announces the addition of a Lear 31 and a Gulfstream III to their FAR Part 135 air carrier certificate. The 8-passenger Lear 31, based at ADS, recently underwent a complete interior and exterior refurbishment. The Gulfstream, based at Fort Worth Meacham Field, is equipped with all the high-end and expected amenities for an aircraft of its class, including DVD, VCR, CD systems, flight phone and fax.

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brand new B-17. "You know the thrill of that new car smell? Well, airplanes have it, too!" Johnson explains. "It was one of the new models, with twin 50-calibers in the nose and twin 50s on each side. We were a gunship as well as a bomber." Assigned to England, the crew ferried their new bomber across the Atlantic via Labrador, Greenland, Iceland and on to Scotland.

In June 1943, Johnson's B-17 was shot down over Germany, and he spent the next two years in a prisoner of war camp. That's where his jewelry store experience came back into the picture. He wrote a standard seven-line POW postcard to the Rolex Watch Company in Geneva, Switzerland requesting watches for the POWs. Rolex obliged and for a time managed to send about \$200,000 worth of small wristwatches to the POWs with notes hoping that the American boys would pay for the watches when they returned home after the war. Turns out about half of them did just that.

After the war, Johnson returned to Dallas and Linz Jewelers. Johnson kept his hand in aviation, flying for the Air Force Reserve out of Hensley Field near Dallas. He was recalled to active duty for the Korean War but then returned again to the jewelry store. In 1958, he was hired away from Linz to become one of the first U.S. traveling salesmen for a growing watch company - Rolex - with a 10-state territory including Texas. Years later, when Johnson was at the

company headquarters, they unearthed some of the original records showing shipments of the watches to the POWs. The orders bore the signature of the founder of the company, Hans Wilsdorf.

Johnson's first encounter with Addison Airport was in its earliest days when his Air Force Reserve unit was asked to provide a fly-over for a ceremony. "We flew T-28s, these big old lumbering airplanes. We flew around all over this country up here looking for Addison Airport. There were just a few buildings out here. We did a few rolls and then went out over downtown Dallas."

In 1969, after more than 10 years traveling his extensive territory by automobile, Johnson bought the Cessna 310, the one with the 8-track, from his childhood friend, Bobby Folsom (the same Folsom who was mayor of Dallas). Flying into ADS late one Friday night, Johnson had the 310 on low final onto the turf crosswind runway that used to cross about where today's Westgrove Drive is. He saw a blinking red light ahead and pulled out just in time to miss the tail of the Goodyear blimp which had drifted across the runway.

Many years and a few airplanes later, Red Johnson still loves to fly his 421 from ADS. "Now about all I do is fly to Kerrville, pick up the mail at my house there, and fly back. But it keeps me current." And probably well ahead in his quest to be ADS's oldest current pilot!

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their planes, and they know we'll take care of them and their aircraft."

Dickerson started out in aircraft sales in Tyler but after 15 years in that arena decided he wanted to offer more value to his customers. That led him to start NDA. "The charter business offered the opportunity to manage the aircraft and help the owner defray the expenses as opposed to just selling them a plane."

Dickerson wants to grow NDA, but not at the expense of losing their personal approach. "We're growing but we plan to keep the business focused on building close relationships with a small number of very special clients."

ADDISON EVENTS

ADDISON COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE @ Sam's Club parking lot, 4150 Belt Line Road
Sat. Oct. 2, 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Find great bargains on furniture, clothing, household items and jewelry at Addison's semi-annual tradition.

BOOKWORM BASH @ Addison Circle Park Pavilion, 4970 Addison Circle Drive
Nov. 5 - Nov. 7, all day Fri., Sat., Sun., Browse through books of all kinds. Benefiting Senior Adult Services.

WATER TOWER THEATRE PRESENTS @ Addison Theatre Center, 15650 Addison Road
Check local listings for specific times. Oct. 7-31: "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues," a musical revue of the rhythms of Africa to the sounds of southside Chicago. The best of the blues is a crash course in the history of America's musical tradition. Dec. 1-31: "A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline," a loving tribute featuring Jenny Thurman on stage tracing the life of one of America's most loved singers. Dec. 1-23: "The Santaland Diaries," David Sedaris' hysterical take on the holiday season.

For additional details about upcoming events, please visit the Town of Addison's website at www.addisontexas.net.

If you are not receiving regular email communications from Airport Administration, please call the office at 972-392-4850.
www.addisoncharter.com
Addison, Texas 75001
Suite 220
16051 Addison Road
(P) 972-392-4850
(F) 972-788-9334
(W) cl.addison.tx.us

ADDISON AIRPORT ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

