

# WINGS OF HOPE

**Interliners join in a program of obtaining and distributing aircraft for humanitarian purposes throughout the world**

by LESLIE STACKEL

**M**ANY HUMANITARIAN organizations preach a philosophy of self-help to the needy, but few promote this policy as dramatically or as effectively as Wings of Hope, a non-profit, non-sectarian group that—with the aid of interliners and others—helps to bring supplies of food and medicine to people in remote areas of the world.

Unlike other charitable organizations, Wings of Hope helps by sending aircraft to missionaries who use them to bring food and emergency health care to isolated populations in Africa, South America, New Guinea, Alaska and other corners of the globe.

Founded by a group of St. Louis businessmen, it serves as a "wholesale clearinghouse for humanitarian endeavors." Wings of Hope helps the samaritans of the world do their job by harnessing its members' aviation know-how in tasks that range from overhauling an aircraft's engine to setting up a radio network to sending a commercial pilot on a ferry flight to New Guinea.

The organization was originally conceived about 15 years ago when, during a deadly African drought, a missionary from Kenya's Turkana Desert came to the U.S. seeking aid. He met William Edwards, a St. Louis manufacturer's representative.

The missionary requested a plane to transport relief supplies to thousands of starving desert nomads. Trucks laden with food, he explained, could not pass through the region because, ironically, heavy rains on the windward side of the desert mountains caused flooding which made the roads impassable.

Edwards consulted his friend, Joe Fabick, a St. Louis manufacturer and pilot, who in turn interested George Haddaway, a flight magazine publisher, and Ozark's Paul Rodgers, who is now president of Air One of St. Louis. These men worked out a plan to raise money for the plane by rebuilding and selling heavy equipment donated by private firms and placing all proceeds into an airplane fund.



**AT DEDICATION** of the Ed Mack Miller Memorial Airplane in Denver are Johnson M. (Jack) Taylor, board member, Wings of Hope; Mrs. Zack Cajet, wife of the Honduran Consul, and Mrs. Ed Mack (Cathy) Miller

The missionary's goal became a reality, but even more importantly, stories of other missionaries with similar problems inspired the four men to form a core group of airline and heavy machinery experts offering help worldwide on a regular basis. Thus, Wings of Hope was born. Today, Edwards is executive vice president of the organization and Haddaway and Rodgers are both on the 12-member board of directors.

Also on the board is Capt. Vernon Brown, retired vice president of operations/inspection for American Airlines.

"We view ourselves as the missing link in an important chain of human assistance programs," said Edwards. "Much of what we do is made possible through donations—in money, property and personal services.

"Right now, we have about 500 active-member donors from commercial carriers who have learned about us through our ads in aviation

publications [which appear free of charge, incidentally], and who often will call up and ask 'what can I do to help?'"

One recent case Edwards cites is that of Capt. Douglas Cline from United Airlines. Cline noticed a Wings of Hope ad in an issue of a flight publication, and consequently donated a 53 Beach Bonanza D35, along with his permission to sell it for a plane better equipped to handle bush and utility flying.

#### 'We'll take anything'

"The donation of used airplanes is our mainstay, and accounts for over half of our national support," Edwards continued. "But we will take any equipment, spare parts or tools that can be used to rebuild planes and radio systems or that can be sold for new ones. We'll take anything of value and make some use of it."

Wings of Hope also regularly receives cash donations from airline employes, private individuals, and has been the recipient of fund-



raising drives organized by students and businessmen, as well as offers of radios and machinery by aircraft manufacturers, one of whom also extends special discounts to Wings of Hope for new aircraft.

Some of the most valuable contributions Wings of Hope receives, however, come in the form of time and effort volunteered by interliners.

Edwards points out instances of personal sacrifice on the part of pilots from major carriers and describes the case of Capt. Bud Fuchs of Ozark who read about Wings of Hope and immediately volunteered his service for a one-time ferry delivery of a Piper Super Cub to a missionary in Bolivia.

Wings of Hope is also the beneficiary of Missionary Airline Ferry Service, organized by United Airlines Capt. Bob Burdick, and consisting of 10 volunteer pilots from about four

different commercial airlines who donate their time to deliver planes overseas.

A plane transfer of this type to a location such as New Guinea ordinarily would cost \$8,000-\$10,000, according to Edwards, but Wings of Hope pays one-third to one-half, with the money saved in pilot's fee and return flight passage.

#### Food and care

"In most cases, the delivery of a plane to such places means food and medical care for thousands of people who might be suffering, but are unable to reach villages from the boonies," Edwards explains. They live in outlying parts of a country, perhaps cut off from civilization by dangerous jungle roads or by desert or mountains. Places where the only means of transportation is an aircraft and where hope comes in the form of a whirring engine overhead.

Paul Rodgers tells of a typical Wings of Hope rescue story and of the impact on the lives of needy populations.

"I flew down with Joe Fabick to Iquitos, Peru, one of the most remote places along the Amazon River, to see how our assistance and equipment were being used, and was amazed at how our planes actually save lives every day. In this particular case we visited a leper colony where, apart from short-wave radio, there was no contact with the outside world. No highways, not even regular boat service. In this primitive colony there was a young boy who was badly burned in an accident. He needed care and was carried out in a carved-out log to our Cessna 182 resting on floats on the Amazon River. Within 35 minutes we had him in an Iquitos hospital, but if he had to be transported down the Amazon, it might've taken three weeks. He probably wouldn't have survived."

But, this type of service is less than one-half of what we do, Rodgers says. "If there's a missing service or dimension in another organization's program, and it takes money, equipment and delivery, engine overhauls, pilot training, anything related to air transportation and avionics machinery, we will try to help."

Edwards points out that no two deals are quite the same. "Each

request we get from different missionaries and humanitarian organizations is unique."

He gives an example: "Over the last two months, we received four requests from different missionary bodies in three countries. In most instances, we acted as a buying and delivery agent of airplanes suitable for field use, but each case had its own special twist.

"In one, a German missionary stationed in Bolivia not only wanted us to purchase a single engine aircraft larger than his own (with money sent from his headquarters in Stuttgart) and equip the plane with fine avionics gear, but to give him 12 hours of concentrated transition training. We did. He paid \$65,000 in machinery that would've cost him more than \$100,000 in Bolivia."

Not only dollar savings, but manpower utilization is compounded when Wings of Hope is called upon.

"After 15 years in the field, our type of program, well applied where needed, multiplies the efficiency of some groups twenty-fold. We don't need thousands of Americans around to make things work for these people all over the world. When combined with Wings of Hope, there is a maximized power in only a few."



**PAUL J. RODGERS**, formerly of Ozark, has brought aid by air to such remote places as a leper colony on the Amazon River.

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ADVERTISEMENTS such as the one above are published without charge in various aviation publications with excellent results. Capt. Douglas Cline of United Airlines, for one, responded with a Beach Bonanza D35 along with permission to sell it and use the proceeds for a plane better equipped for "bush" and utility flying.