



P R E S S R E L E A S E

Rarefied Air

HeloAir, Inc. received the 2005 IMPACT Award from the Chamber of Commerce

Richmond.com - Caine O'Rear

Whit Baldwin began his flying career as a helicopter pilot covering traffic in the Richmond area. Then, in 1992, he started **HeloAir, Inc.** with just a single airplane to his name. Today, with 17 employees and nine helicopters, the Richmond-based helicopter charter company is the largest of its kind in the Mid-Atlantic.



In addition to providing charter services, HeloAir also assists in disaster relief efforts, delivers organ transplants and films traffic for television news.

The work of HeloAir has not gone unnoticed in the Richmond region. At the 138th **Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce** Annual Dinner on Nov. 4, the company was honored with the 2005 IMPACT Award. The award recognizes business that have: expanded in sales and employees, demonstrated innovation, responded to adversity, contributed to the community and offered a quality work environment for their employees.

"It's a great honor for the company," said Baldwin, who admitted to being somewhat overwhelmed by the accolade. "But we have a unique asset that we can provide."

Jim Dunn, former chairman of the GRCC, told *Richmond.com* that "[the Committee] was very impressed with their sales and employee growth. If they went out of business today, no one could take their place."

Since its inception, Baldwin has added a helicopter to its fleet every one and a half to two years. "It's been a slow growth model in a very capital intensive business," he said.

Half of the company's pilots have a military background, though Baldwin said they are now seeing more civilian-trained pilots.

HeloAir is unique in that it does not operate on a fixed schedule, but flies at the whim of its clients. "We're an on-demand charter business," said Baldwin. "And we do it priced by the hour. You're going to pay us only when the rotors are turning."

Flights are priced by the hour, and the type of aircraft used. For a one-hour flight in one of the small helicopters, the customer would pay \$825. The larger helicopters would run \$1,225 and \$1,550 an hour.

The company only flies to areas within 250 nautical miles of where they lifted off. However, they also "ferry" flights out of some locations, like San Diego. This means that HeloAir would not fly to San Diego from Richmond, say, but would fly you from San Diego to a destination within 250 miles.

Expediency is perhaps the company's best selling point. "I can pick you up at your office in Richmond and have you in downtown Manhattan quicker than if you drove to the [Richmond] airport, got on your own Lear jet, flew to New York and drove to Manhattan," said Baldwin.

HeloAir sent two choppers down to the Gulf Coast to assist with the **Hurricane Katrina** relief effort. The company was contracted through an agency that had been contracted through the **Federal Emergency Management Association**. The company operated out of Lafayette, La., and Pascagoula, Miss., transporting doctors, nurses and vaccines to those in need.

Baldwin, who traveled to the Gulf Coast region twice, said television coverage of Katrina did not do justice to the scope of the devastation. "It's almost unfathomable. The first time I saw it, it was almost physically depressing."