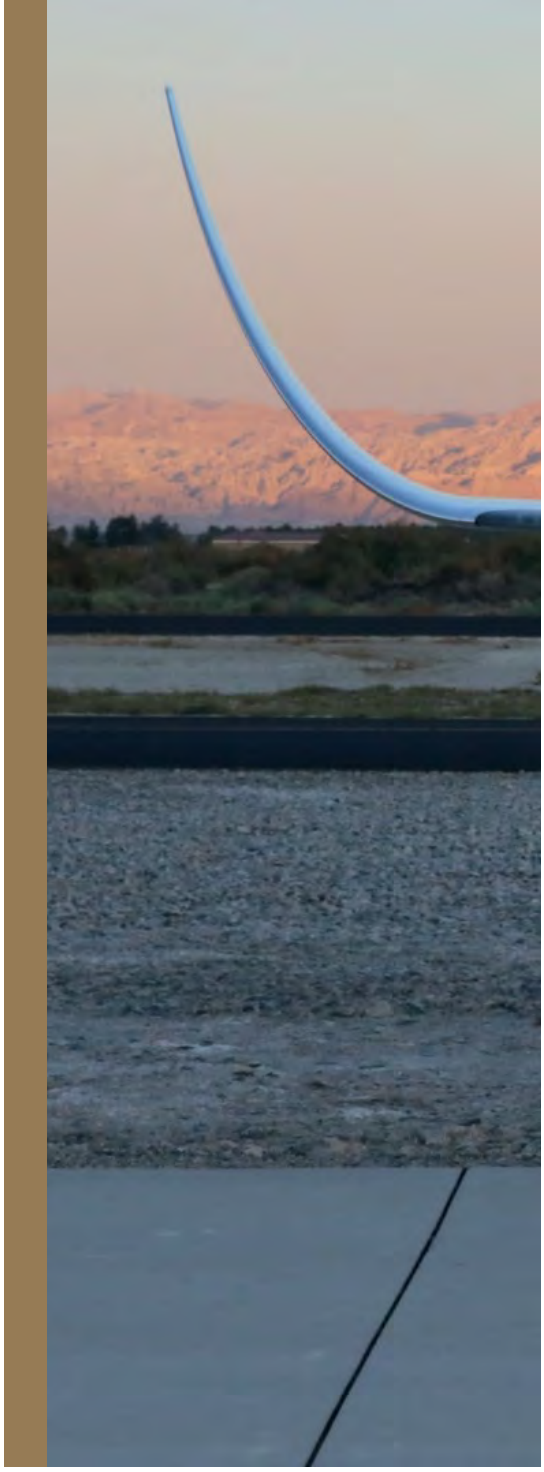
Desert Jet's recent acquisition, a Citation Bravo, joins a fleet mix of super mid, light and very light private jets based throughout Southern California.

# Desert Fox



**Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport (KTRM) in Southern California has a new, modern look. Desert Jet Center is the newest full-service Fixed-Base Operator (FBO) facility on the field. Construction now complete, this brand new, cutting-edge terminal and hangar facility is now open for business, with a relatively new CEO at its controls. Jared Fox talks to Inflight's Tim Guest about how he is finding his new desert setting.**

## When 'Old Blood and Guts'

General George Patton took command of the newly established Thermal Army Air Field and Desert Training Center (now KTRM) in 1942, used as an air support command base as part of the wider Desert Training Center in the Mojave Desert, it was to prepare the US Army for the invasion of North Africa. But even with his renowned foresight, Patton would have been hard pressed to visualise how the airfield would look nearly 80 years later. Today, nothing of the military remains, but this now county-owned and public-use airport for general aviation (GA) operations

**Wing Man: Fox's career in aviation has spanned a broad spectrum of industry-related roles, culminating at Desert Jet as its new CEO.**

some 20 miles south-east of Palm Springs in the Coachella Valley, is thriving and boasts some of the latest and most sophisticated GA and FBO facilities, not to mention aircraft, operating from any such airfield in the region. And it's those very latest facilities, with another new commander, Jared Fox, that belong to Desert Jet.

**Inflight:** You took over the CEO role in July. With 20 years in the industry, what path did you take on your way to eventually landing at Desert Jet?

**Fox:** Throughout my aviation career I've striven to always get experiences in every area possible. Whether managing airports, running FBOs, flying or selling charter and aircraft, I want to learn as much as possible. I believe 'Jack of all trades, master of none' is a badge of honour for a leader. I don't need to be the person who knows everything. I'd rather surround myself with people who are experts in their field and that want to be a part of a successful team.

**Inflight:** Your appointment in July enabled company founder, Denise Wilson, to become Chairman of the Board across all Desert Jet companies. How closely are you working with her and with less than six months at the helm

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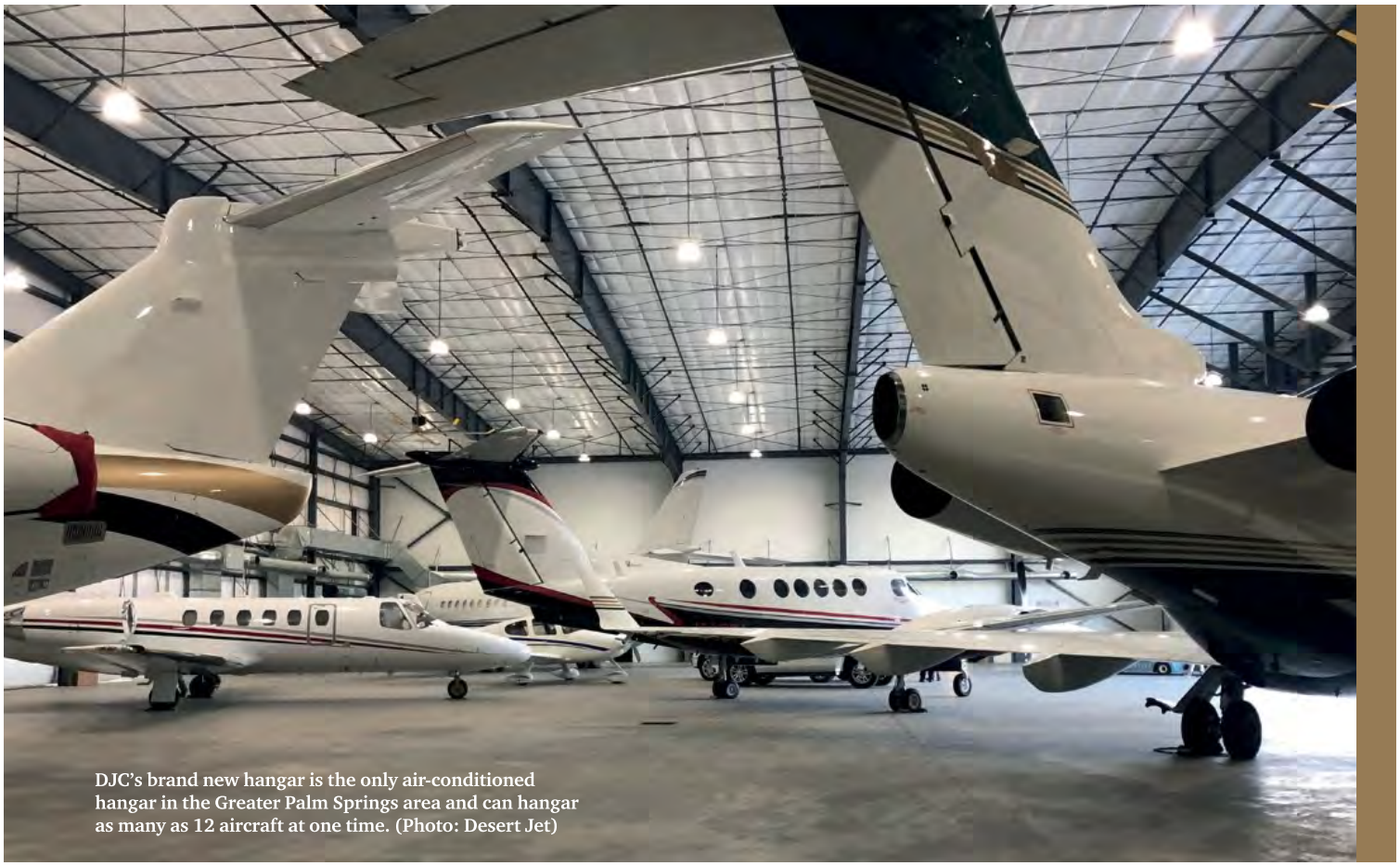

DJC's brand new hangar is the only air-conditioned hangar in the Greater Palm Springs area and can hangar as many as 12 aircraft at one time. (Photo: Desert Jet)

is it fair to ask what you have achieved so far? An end-October statement said with its 'new FBO facility and headquarters, Desert Jet will be focused on expanding its workforce and accelerating the growth of all its business entities'. Can you expand on this?

**Fox:** I work very closely with both owners of Desert Jet as well as our advisory Board. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience I can tap into and I'm never afraid to do so. Denise has been a wonderful resource for me and instrumental to the growth of the company.

As for what I've achieved so far, I believe it's always fair to ask a CEO what they've accomplished! I come to work every day with a goal of making a positive difference to our team and to our companies. To me, a day without improving [something] is a day wasted.

In the first 100 days of my being at Desert Jet we've opened our brand new, state-of-the-art FBO, charter headquarters and hangar. We've added one plane to our charter certificate with two more in the pipeline; we have increased the number of charter hours flown and we've just completed a successful ARG/US audit, " "renewing our platinum-rated status. We have also added a new Director of Safety to our 135 operations and we've created an Ambassador programme to ensure our employees and customers fully experience the Desert Jet 'Vision'. We will continue to add to our great team as needed and as we find 'A' players who want to be a part of something special. My short, medium- and long-term goals are all the same – to ensure Desert Jet delivers on its promises to our employees, customers and community. I want the company always to be a place where people love to work and that customers flock to for the best service in the industry.

> "Desert Jet is made up of Desert Jet Charter, Desert Jet Center – the FBO, Desert Jet Detailing and its Part 145 maintenance company, Desert Jet Maintenance."

**Inflight:** How many companies make up the Desert Jet Group and what are your main activities? Is any one of these more important to the business than others, or are they all complementary necessities to Desert Jet's overall, full-service offering?

**Fox:** Desert Jet is made up of Desert Jet Charter, Desert Jet Center (DJC) – our FBO, Desert Jet Detailing and our Part 145 maintenance company, Desert Jet Maintenance. The group of Desert Jet companies are a full-service business and general aviation one-stop shop. We can assist with nearly all aviation needs including aircraft management, aircraft charter, maintenance, fuelling, detailing, and aircraft hangaring. I see all components of our businesses as essential to ensuring our customers' experience is an exemplary, anticipatory service. Much like the old adage that the Cessna 150 on your ramp today may be piloted by the pilot of the G650 landing at our airport tomorrow, Desert Jet understands

that we must treat every customer and every job as if it is the most important we will do today. There are no small tasks if you want to be successful.

**Inflight:** Tell us about your brand new state-of-the-art FBO facility, the plans for its grand opening and what this status means in real terms at KTRM and regionally?

**Fox:** We recently moved into our gorgeous new facility and are just getting settled in. We are enthralled by our new digs and have been receiving great feedback from our customers. As with any brand new construction, we have a few punch list items to finish up and then we will schedule a grand opening event in 2020. DJC's new facilities bring KTRM out of the 1980s and into the 21st century; it's the only FBO new construction in the Coachella Valley for many years and delivers an unparalleled experience for aircraft passengers and crews.

**Inflight:** How big is Desert Jet's own fleet of charter aircraft and what is its composition? Your latest aircraft acquisition was in August; what was that aircraft and do you have other fleet expansion plans in the pipeline?

**Fox:** Desert Jet's fleet is made up of Citation Bravos, Citation CJ3s and a gorgeous Wi-Fi-enabled Challenger 300. Our entire fleet of CJ3 aircraft have been upgraded with the installation of the Gogo L3 AVANCE high-speed Wi-Fi. We expect the fleet to grow in 2020 as we introduce new management programmes and as I am able to share our vision with more aircraft owners.

> "DJC's brand-new, state-of-the-art, 22,500-square-foot hangar has 28-foot hangar doors to easily accommodate the latest corporate jets, including aircraft as large as the Gulfstream G650 and Global 7500."

**Inflight:** With your own fleet of aircraft are you focused purely on regional business or do your services extend nationwide across North America and also internationally and for what kinds of customers?

**Fox:** Desert Jet Charter assists customers with their trips throughout North America and worldwide. We stop at nothing to ensure customers receive the service they desire. We assist them wherever they are in the world. If we can't cover a flight in one of our aircraft, we can work with one of the vetted operators we have relationships with, to provide a solution that meets our customer's needs. We see a wide range of customers on our aircraft from CEOs and their employees, families going on vacation, surgeons flying to do surgery, friends coming to the desert to enjoy all that's offered here, or Angel Flight West passengers [non-emergency air travel for children and adults with serious medical conditions]. For all of our passengers, we strive to ensure the best possible in-flight experience. Many of our customers have been using our services for over 10 years and often recommend us to their friends.

**Inflight:** How much hangar space does the new DJC have and how many aircraft can be housed and/or worked on at any one time?

**DJC's new facilities bring KTRM out of the 1980s and into the 21st century; it's the only FBO new construction in the Coachella Valley for many years. (Photo: Desert Jet)**

> I joined Desert Jet because it is a different kind of aviation company. As CEO I intend to continue, and hope to add, to the core values installed since day one. We're not trying to become the largest aviation company in the industry. In fact, I'd prefer we remain a small giant.

**Fox:** DJC's brand-new, state-of-the-art, 22,500-square-foot hangar has 28-foot hangar doors to easily accommodate the latest corporate jets, including aircraft as large as the Gulfstream G650 and Global 7500. The only air-conditioned hangar in the greater Palm Springs area, it offers a temperature-controlled environment for the crew and travellers when they embark, as well as providing a comfortable workspace for our onsite FAA Part 145 Certified Repair Station, Desert Jet Maintenance. We're able to hangar as many as 12 aircraft at one time.

**Inflight:** What safety qualifications set Desert Jet Center apart from other FBOs in the region and what does this mean for your customers and attracting business?

**Fox:** Safety is paramount to our culture at DJC and our commitment to our customers and employees. DJC is the only FBO in Thermal, the greater Palm Springs area, Southern California and the overall desert southwest region, to hold both IS-BAH (International Standards for Business Aircraft Handling) registration and the NATA Safety 1st certification. Dedicated to continual improvement, DJC now maintains an IS-BAH Stage II designation.

**Inflight:** Desert Jet has some admirable core values that set it apart from much of the dog-eat-dog business world of today. Can you discuss these and explain how important these have been to the success of the business? In taking over the helm as CEO, will you ensure these values are maintained or even complemented?

**Fox:** I joined Desert Jet because it is a different kind of aviation company. As CEO I intend to continue, and hope to add, to the core values installed since day one. We're not trying to become the largest aviation company in the industry. In fact, I'd prefer we remain a small giant. If we work to get a little better everyday then anything is possible. The team at Desert Jet is here because they all want to be at a place where they can make a difference and be proud to work. It truly is a team effort. We'll succeed or fail based on our team members.

**Inflight:** In this age of environmental crisis and climate change, what are Desert Jet's environmental policies vis a vis: carbon footprint, recycling, re-use, eliminating single-use plastics, etc?

**Fox:** Much like the entire industry, this is an important topic to me. I'd like to see Desert Jet become a leader in pushing our industry to improve our impact. We're constantly looking for ways to be better stewards of our planet.

**Inflight:** As you alluded to earlier, you've recently introduced Gogo L3 AVANCE high-speed Wi-Fi onboard some aircraft. Are you intending to roll this in-flight connectivity solution out across your whole fleet?

**Fox:** Our Supermid aircraft, the Challenger 300, has had Wi-Fi for a few years and we've seen a great response to those capabilities. We've also now added Wi-Fi to our CJ3 fleet as well. Business aircraft users need to stay connected while in-flight, so upgrading more of our aircraft will ensure this is easier than ever. I'd like to see our entire fleet have Wi-Fi by the end of 2020.

**Inflight:** Finally, how does Desert Jet maintain your 'small giant' status and remain at the top of your game in terms of training?

**Fox:** We do not want to grow just for growth sake, we will be very conscious about how we grow in order to ensure we are providing our current customers and employees the best possible partnership. The Desert Jet team is just under 50 aviation professionals, all of whom receive regular training based on their positions. Pilots are in the simulator every six months, as well as receiving ongoing ground and classroom training. Desert Jet is proud of our commitment to training as shown by our ARG/US Platinum rating, Wyvern Wingman and IS-BAO Stage III certifications. ■