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A guardian angel for do-it-yourself fliers

If you want to buy a big business jet, there's no shortage of brokers and management companies that are eager to help you in the areas of mission analysis, acquisition, finance, accounting, legal contracts, insurance, refurbishment, maintenance, crew selection, training and day-to-day operations. But what if you're interested in owning a smaller aircraft—maybe even flying it yourself? True, most brokers at that level are well equipped to assist with many of the details of the transaction, but after the ink is dry on the contract, chances are you'll be on your own.

Guardian Jet of Guilford, Conn., is a new company that hung out its shingle in February. It fields a staff of five, including a veteran accountant and tax specialist, as well as three seasoned aviation professionals. Guardian Jet's stated mission is to provide owner-pilots with the stewardship usually provided by management companies for operators of larger aircraft, but with some out-of-the-ordinary, flying-club-like services added as well.

As evidenced by its name, Guardian Jet's target market is turbine-aircraft owners, though company founder and president Michael Dwyer said owners at all aircraft-performance levels could make use of the company's services. Guardian Echelon Membership (GEM) is meant for owners/operators of Cessna Citations through the 550 series and of Raytheon Premier Is. Whether to charge annual membership fees or a one-time initiation fee is currently being evaluated. Broker fees for network members who ultimately choose to sell their aircraft would provide the revenues.

GEM members have access to a menu of consulting services, including financial and tax advice as well as guidance on insurance, training and other issues. Members could join before buying the aircraft for access to performance evaluations (making sure they've picked the right airplane for the mission) and pre-buy inspection services. So far on a complimentary basis, Guardian Jet has signed 10 members in its GEM program. Dwyer said his current aim is to attain some critical mass for the program. "So far, we have a trickle that we hope will turn into a flow, a river and then a flood."

An ATP with a CitationJet type rating, Dwyer told AIN, "Aircraft brokering is certainly part of the business plan at Guardian Jet, but our goal is not to call up an aircraft owner and ask, 'Is your aircraft for sale?' but rather, 'Hi, Mr. Jones. Do you have a pebble in your shoe I can help take out?' Your problem may have to do with anything from finding a good avionics shop to trying to save some money in financing to airport-access issues. Then if we do a good job, maybe I'll earn

the right to sell your airplane for you when it goes on the market. We don't simply acquire or sell an aircraft and then disappear—we're there for the duration."

And Guardian Jet has some other owners' services that fall well outside the radar scope of most other providers. Maybe you're interested in air-to-air photography of your aircraft. Guardian Jet can arrange photo sessions with groups of aircraft owners at photogenic locations, such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. An experienced air-to-air photographer shoots the pictures from a chase airplane flown by a suitably-trained pilot. On these sorties, the owner is expected to fly as PIC in his airplane (or provide a PIC), with an experienced formation pilot in the right seat for safety.

Interested in warbirds? Guardian Jet can arrange flight time in a dual-control P-51 Mustang through Stallion 51 in Kissimmee, Fla. Dwyer said, "I'd like Guardian Jet to become a lightning rod for any services our members would like to experience or share. Our core business is to provide owners and operators an access point to consulting, oversight and brokerage services. But we also believe we can add some fun to the process, as well."

Among the more mundane services Guardian Jet can help with are technical advice through its centralized accounting and tax-consulting department. Also, Guardian Jet members have access to MedAire airborne medical services, Facts survival training programs and AirCare International's light-jet access program. Dwyer said he now has access to the Colt fuel discount program and will enroll Guardian Jet members if they so desire.

—Mark Phelps

