The past year has certainly presented many new challenges as we have all faced the global pandemic. Here at Deer Valley (DVT), the health and safety of our customers and staff is paramount and we have taken a number of precautions in an effort to reduce health risks. Some of these precautions include a mandatory face covering requirement in the terminal, a plexiglass barrier at the airport operations counter, and daily sanitization and disinfection of “high-touch” areas in the terminal. In fact, DVT recently received the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Facility Accreditation. This accreditation is only bestowed upon those facilities that are able to demonstrate a higher level of standard for ensuring that their facilities are clean, safe, and healthy. Along with Phoenix Goodyear Airport, we are the first general aviation airports in the country to receive this accreditation. Additionally, we have developed new ways of transacting business to reduce or eliminate the need for customers to come into the terminal by utilizing e-mail, electronic signatures, and the addition of a drop box located in front of the terminal. Also, while commercial airports around the world have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, general aviation airports have not been affected to the same extent. In the case of DVT, the airport experienced 402,000 take offs and landings in 2020. While this number is fewer than it was in 2019, it’s very close to those of 2018. Not bad, all things considered.

Deer Valley Airport Restaurant

Many of you have inquired about the status of the airport restaurant. The City of Phoenix is working to get a solicitation out on the street that will provide any interested party with a fair and equal chance to reopen the restaurant. At the time of this writing, we don’t have a firm schedule for the solicitation to be published, but it will be done as soon as possible. The opportunity will be posted on the City of Phoenix website, so if you know anyone who may be interested, please ask them to check https://www.phoenix.gov/business/contract periodically.
Airfield Construction

Not only was 2020 busy in terms of airport operations, it was also a busy year for airfield construction projects. We started off the year with two large-scale projects: the B3 Taxiway Connector and Taxiway D. The shorter of the two projects, the new B3 was completed on schedule in early 2020 and has geometry that complies with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standards. The Taxiway D project was by far the lengthier of the two projects and, due to its size and complexity, was broken into six phases with each phase presenting its own unique challenges. During the project, there were numerous detour routes for taxiing aircraft, NOTAMs, and runway and taxiway closures, but the new taxiway was commissioned in December 2020 and I’d like to thank you all for your patience, understanding, and support!

Lastly, you have probably noticed that Taxiway D terminates at its east end at the D11 intersection. Before the taxiway can be completed full-length, we have to construct a new facility for the Phoenix Police Air Support Unit since their current facility is too close to the future location of Taxiway D between D11-12. The new building is currently in the design phase, and we hope to break ground later in 2021.
Deer Valley Road Construction

A large-scale project is currently underway throughout Phoenix to install a drought water line. While this is not an airport project, it is scheduled to impact Deer Valley Road beginning in the July/August 2021 timeframe. We are predicting significant impacts to traffic on the roadway due to lanes being temporarily reduced from three lanes to one lane in each direction. Additionally, a detour onto airport property will take place in the southeast portion of the airport to accommodate the project. It is scheduled to conclude in the early part of 2022 when all traffic lanes on Deer Valley Road will be re-opened.

Taxi Incident

An incident occurred recently that can be used as a learning tool. An aircraft was northbound at Ramp 1 and intended to make a left turn onto Taxiway D for departure on Runway 7R. Unfortunately, the pilot made his left turn prematurely and found himself on the perimeter road rather than on Taxiway D. In an effort to reduce the chance of this occurring in the future, we have added signage at the entrance to the perimeter road where this incident took place and at the entrance to the perimeter on the north side in the vicinity of Ramp 9.
During the year of 1994 or so, I became a tenant at Phoenix Deer Valley Airport (DVT). At that time, I had a 1941 Aeronca Chief almost ready to fly. I had been working on the restoration in my garage for almost nine years. Now it was ready for the wings and engine to be installed and so it was moved to DVT. I reached airline pilot retirement age in 1997 (60 years old at that time) and knew that in retirement I would require more airplane to fly than the Aeronca could provide. I noticed there were at least two different groups of warbirds flying formation and flight demonstrations based at DVT. There was a North American T-6 group and a Nanchang CJ-6 group. I saw the CJ-6 group fly formation demonstrations at a couple of airports. I did not know anything about the aircraft, but at one of the demonstrations, a couple of the CJ-6 pilots answered some questions about planes that got me thinking.

Sometime in 1997, as I was leaving DVT after working on the Aeronca, I noticed a mechanic working on one of the CJs. I stopped and introduced myself and he told me about the plane in great detail and put me in the cockpit to see what it was like. By the time I arrived at home, I had decided I really needed a CJ! Fortunately, my wife was on board and I put the Aeronca on the market and started looking for a CJ to buy. At that time, there was a group of four CJs painted very much alike and they flew formation demos around the valley, as well as out of town. I spoke with a couple of them and was told I would be able to fly with them as long as my plane was
similar in appearance. The CJ group introduced me to a CJ importer, and I placed an order for the aircraft when my wife was out of town. I was told by the gang at DVT that the importer was a man of his word. In aviation we all depend on those we deal with to be honest and true to their word. I gave him $14,000 and sent a check for $19,000 to his partner in China. I also gave him several thousand additional dollars for the packing and shipping to DVT from Nanchang, China. The total was $43,000 or so. My wife returned to town and I excitedly told her what I had done. She asked what all was in the contract and I said, “What contract”? Needless to say, she was a little testy with me. I called the importer, and he sent me a very simple contract, which did make my wife feel a little better. Several months later, the plane arrived and it was exactly as I was told it would be.

While I awaited the delivery of my CJ project, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the formation group. During this time, I discovered the formation group was a very close social unit. On occasion, one of them would do some training for an outsider. I would later take advantage of this.

Finally, around early 1999, my CJ project arrived from China and I set about getting it in a safe and legal flying condition. With some help from my son, I finally had an airworthy aircraft after about 19 months of assembly.

The formation group all belonged to the YAK Pilots organization, now known as the Redstar Pilots Association (RPA). The RPA was a member of the FAST (Formation and Safety Training) organization, an umbrella organization that was the FAA-approved formation sanctioning entity. The RPA has a manual on how formation is to be flown, as well as instructors to train pilots to perform safely in formation. It has check pilots, as well as annual requirements to maintain currency. To maintain currency as a formation pilot, one must fly regularly in formation. DVT had an RPA formation check pilot at one of the hangars and so many pilots would fly in to complete their qualification as either a wingman or lead. Several pilots at DVT bought CJs and became formation qualified. At one time, there were eleven CJ-6 aircraft based at DVT. There are other warbirds based at DVT that are compatible with the speeds and performance of the CJ. The USAF T-34, T-6, YAK 52 and YAK 50 are all able to fly formation with the CJ. A few years back, one of the pilots was able to rent the former Champion hangar at FFZ and several of the group moved there to take advantage of the reduced cost. The CJ is a popular aircraft due to the price and cost of operation. The CJ-6 is usually available for between $90,000 and $110,000. The additional costs would be hangar rent, fuel, insurance, and annual maintenance.

The CJ has undergone many modifications from the original Chinese version. Most of them in the Phoenix area have a Russian engine, the M14, which has 75 more horsepower than the original Chinese engine, but is about the same weight. The strong hand leading the modifications was the late Bill Blackwell. Bill was probably the most knowledgeable aircraft mechanic on maintaining and modifying the
CJ-6 fleet. Bill pioneered the replacement of the Chinese 285HP engine with the Russian 360HP engine. Additionally, Bill modified the exhaust system, developed a different shutoff valve within the pneumatic system, as well as replacing all the Chinese pneumatic valves with U.S. made stainless steel valves. There are other engine modifications that also increase performance. This increase in performance is desirable due to the summertime high-density altitude here in Phoenix, as well as better ability to maintain formation position. An additional fuselage modification was the replacement of the small, aluminum fuel tanks with rubber bladders. This was developed by the late Gill Gutierrez. This extended the range with reserves from an hour and a half to three and a half hours, a significant change. An additional attractive feature of the M14 engine is it only burns about 15 gallons per hour flying local formation training. It requires an FAA licensed mechanic to maintain it, but that same mechanic can perform the annual condition inspection. A mechanic with an “Inspection Authorization” is not required. There are a couple of parts importers and parts are readily available. There is a machine shop just off the airport that can machine or repair parts that are not available. The machine shop owner has a YAK52 and is a member of the formation group. One significant difference of the CJs compared to many other aircraft is that the fasteners are all metric. Metric fasteners are available, but usually have to be ordered from out of town. The mechanic also has to have a substantial metric tool set.

The formation group is called Squadron 20 because this is the sequence number of the squadron when it was chartered by the Experimental Aircraft Association back in the early 1990s. The group performs formation flights typically once a week or so, and frequently receives requests to perform “missing man formation” flights during services for fallen warriors.

To close, I would like to point out that the DVT warbird community is very social and helps each other with parts and tools. It is not unusual to go to DVT on a hot summer day and find warbird pilots on the north side just hanging out. Also, the group at DVT has been strong leaders in modifying the CJ fleet for both increased safety and performance.
As a young woman coming of age, Beth’s father died of leukemia. It had been diagnosed years earlier, but she was too young to fully comprehend. What she did understand, all too well at the age of 13, was that now there was a void in her life. Later, in her nightly letters to her father sharing her day and exploits, she hoped, however possible, that he would be proud of her. This is a story of determination, hard work and perseverance in the face of obstacles.

Beth graduated college in the early 1980s with a degree in Chinese studies and spoke Mandarin fluently. A year later while leading a tour group to China, she became ill. She returned to the United States where doctors diagnosed her with optic neuritis, an inflammation of the optic nerve that can be an early sign of multiple sclerosis.

In her early years, on summer trips to Colorado, Beth was introduced to aviation. Now, after her diagnosis, she made a fervent promise to learn to fly. Beth went to work for New England Flyers at Beverly Airport near Boston, where in exchange for her services, she received flight training. There she met a colorful band of characters—Rod, Melanie and Steve—who would each would shape and impact her life in ways she never could have imagined.

Beth’s life as an aviator began to blossom. Obtaining her private, instrument, multi, and ATP she pressed on to gain hours. She tells harrowing stories of adventure, one involving a Cub and Ramapo Valley Airport, or what was left of it.

She trained and towed banners over beaches. Beth tells the tale of a banner that would not release so she could make a safe landing, so a fellow pilot flew up alongside her and cut the cable with his prop. She advanced to part 135 work, flying Navajos and delivering Investor’s Business Daily bundles to various airports. She also flew IBM boxes. No one ever knew what was in those boxes, only that it paid well. Throughout her experiences, she always felt her father was right by her side.

In June of 1989, Beth flew to Kansas City for a three-day interview with TWA and faced physical examinations, psychological testing and flying in the flight sim. At the end of July, she received the call she had been waiting for her entire adult life. She had been assigned to a Boeing 727 training class. She had qualified
as a flight engineer.

One year later, in her doctor’s office after symptoms of dizziness and weakness, she received the news that she had come to expect. That tape that had been playing since 1984 as a “probable” multiple sclerosis was now a full-fledged diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. She no longer qualified as a Class I FAA medical certificate. Her short airline career was over.

The story of Beth Ruggiero is a fascinating one. At no point do we ever question her skills or her ability to fly an airplane. The book at times reads like an intimate look in her diary, other times as an example of what not to do in an airplane (for example, how to roll a Piper.) She truly is an inspiration to all of us in aviation. In a time when women were not welcomed into the field, she stood tall. She endured the belittling and mansplaining and yet did it anyway.

In my interview with Beth, I asked if she missed flying. She said she does and tried to resurrect the love about 20 years ago. She enjoyed the experience but indicates that if she can’t rise to the top, if this is all there is, it’s not for her. Maybe this shall pass. Today, Beth continues her work as a translator and is a published author in the field of photography. She shares her story with student groups and others. She lives in Fountain Hills with her part 107 pilot husband, Ron.

I wrote a story a while back for this newsletter about another book, “It is This Way with Men Who Fly,” by Frank Thomas. That was an homage to my own father who passed a month after reading that article. I, like Beth, still feel his presence every time I fly. I would submit that a subtitle to Beth’s book is, “It is This Way with Women Who Fly.” Because it is. Her story is one of exhilaration, frustration, and excitement.

“Flying Alone: A Memoir,” is available on Amazon and other online booksellers.

Randy Eary is an aircraft owner, private pilot, AGI, IGI, 107 pilot. He is a member of the board of directors of the Deer Valley Pilots Association.