

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know COPA Pilots



LAURIE EINSTEIN KOSZUTA has been a freelance writer for many years and along with her husband, John, now owns a Cirrus SR22. With John as the pilot-in-command and Laurie as the partner, they regularly travel to see family, visit friends and enjoy our beautiful country. You can read more of Laurie's work on her website: www.laurieeinsteinkoszuta.com.



Before buying his 2018 SR22T, Ken Kelly was part of a Cirrus fractional program and then leased one for several years.



After a Career in Roofing, Ken Kelly Takes His Cirrus to New Heights

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

It was a Saturday morning, just a few days before Christmas in 2009 when Ken Kelly received the call. Angel Flight was on the line with a request. Could he immediately accept a mission to fly a 15-year-old boy named Eric and his mother from Naples Airport Authority (KAPF) to Miami Executive Airport (KMIA)? The teenager would be a liver transplant recipient and needed to reach the University of Miami-Jackson Memorial Hospital in short order. Ken readily accepted the mission, understanding its complexity, given that harvested donor organs have a limited life span outside the body. After obtaining the pair's contact information, Ken quickly called the mother to make the necessary arrangements for the transport.

"I was excited to make that call," said Ken, who had been flying Angel and Life Flight missions for four years. Surprisingly, when I connected with the mother and explained that I was the pilot in charge of transportation to Miami, she didn't know what I was talking about as she had yet to be notified. It was exhilarating to tell them the good news since Eric had been waitlisted for a while and was also the same age as my son."

Ken flew Eric and his mother to Miami in a Cirrus SR22, even letting the teenager "fly" the plane for a few minutes during the trip. Upon landing in Miami, Ken realized that ground transportation to the hospital had inadvertently not been prearranged. Not wanting to waste time, he immediately borrowed a crew car from the FBO for the quick trip to the hospital. Once there, Ken and his passengers were met in the admitting department by a transplant clinical pharmacist who promptly escorted them to the appropriate area to prepare the young man for surgery. It was a mission that allowed the young patient to receive a liver transplant but also to play Cupid for Ken. It turned out that the transplant clinical pharmacist and Ken hit it off as soon as they met, and they've been together ever since, eventually marrying.



« **Ken and Jennifer** with their former flying buddy, dog Romeo. Since Ken retired in August 2023, the couple has been able to enjoy flying more for fun.

Long before flying Angel or Life Flight missions, Ken was a single father working at his own ever-expanding roofing business. With four locations throughout Florida and 320 employees, Ken's schedule was packed, and usually involved driving almost daily to conduct business. Because he was gone so much, he often had to miss coaching his son Austin's youth football team. Ken found that continually missing something he and his son enjoyed doing together was unacceptable, and he wanted to make a change. After much thought, Ken concluded that the best solution was to learn to fly. Such a solution would allow him to reduce the time it took to get to destinations, conduct business and return home to resume his role as dad and coach.

"I had always been interested in flying," Ken said, "but I never put much time or effort into researching how to go about it. I didn't know how long it would take to get a license or how much it would cost. What spurred me on was that I hated driving all the time and missing important events."

"I initially wanted to learn to fly strictly for business ... but after a while, I realized that I could fly to the Bahamas for the weekend or have dinner in Key West ... "

In 2004, Ken began his quest for a private license with Europe American Aviation, a flight school out of the Naples Municipal Airport (KAPF), just a half-mile from his office. "Sadly," he said, "that flight school isn't there anymore as the owners closed the business when they retired, but they were great to work with."

"I began this journey at the time when the Cessna 172s had steam gauges," Ken explained. "There were no online course materials as all the bookwork was on compact discs, so I devised a routine. I would watch the videos on the CDs at night and then go to the flight school the next morning to discuss what I studied with my instructor. Then, I would fly that lesson. It was the best

way to reinforce what I had just learned. I would study on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and fly the lessons Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"I'm glad I had the opportunity to learn the old-school way of flying," Ken said. "I am a technology fan, but there is a benefit to understanding what is happening behind the scenes so that if ever there was a failure, at least I'd have that knowledge to fall back on."

Though Ken obtained his private pilot certificate in just over 38 hours from his first lesson to the check ride, he still didn't feel completely competent with his skills. "I didn't feel comfortable in the air," he said. "I communicated and navigated well in the airspace, but I felt a huge responsibility to any passengers

who rode in an airplane with me. I immediately decided to continue my training and have always had personal minimums and goals.”

One of Ken’s goals was to fly with a different instructor every six months to improve and hone his skills. “I knew that every instructor might convey the same message,” he noted, “but their delivery and approach might be different and offer something new to learn. It also inspired me to start my instrument training about three years later.”

According to Ken, the written test was the most challenging part of getting his instrument rating. “I have a general contractor’s and roofing license,” he said, “I work with solar. I have worked with Tesla to help develop their solar roof. I have been tested in many areas, but this was a mountain of information to learn, understand and memorize. It was the hardest test I have ever taken,

but I did it and received my rating in about 43 flight hours.”

“I initially wanted to learn to fly strictly for business,” Ken said, “but after a while, I realized that I could fly to the Bahamas for the weekend or have dinner in Key West and have fun with it. It made me fall in love with aviation.”

After earning his private and instrument ratings, Ken found himself conversing with his teenage son about his future after high school. “My son was thinking of joining the Marines and possibly working with helicopters. I told him I could learn to fly rotary wing, and after that he could fly with me and see if he liked it. It took me about 39 hours to get my rotary rating. After that, I just wanted to continue learning and getting more ratings,” he said with a laugh, “so I have commercial, seaplane and multiengine ratings as well as complex and high-performance endorsements,

I’m spin rated and have a taildragger endorsement, and recently learned light aerobatics with Patty Wagstaff. I have over 1,500 flight hours now.”

Ken’s first Cirrus was as a fractional owner in 2007 with a company that didn’t survive the 2008 recession. However, he became friends with another fractional owner who had already bought a Cirrus and offered him the chance to lease it.

“My friend knew I took great care of the plane in that fractional ownership program,” Ken recalled. “I would go to the hangar on weekends and wax the aircraft’s underbelly as if it were my own. I ended up leasing that plane for 12 years.”

As the years passed and Ken’s business grew, he felt it was time to consider purchasing his own plane. After some research, he found a 2018 SR22T in Sarasota in good condition and with low time.

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4Y	11Q	59G
4Z	11T	59J
5C	11Z	59K
5T	12C	59R
5Y	12E	59S
6C	12H	59U
6E	12L	59W
6H	12U	59X
6N	13F	60D
6S	13G	60G
7G	13Q	60M
7L	13R	60N
7Q	13S	60U
7T	13U	60V
7V	13V	61B
7Y	13Y	61C
7Z	14D	61D
8C	14E	61E
8E	14F	61F
8G	14N	61H
8Q	14S	61J
8R	14Y	61K
8T	15C	61X
9C	15G	61Z
9D	15Q	62L
9M	15W	62N
9T	16D	62P
9W	16H	62Z
9Z	16K	63C
	16T	63H
	16V	63N
	16Y	63Q
	16Z	63U
	17D	63Z
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	17Q	64B
	17V	64R
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➤ **The Kellys** chose to order their G7 SR22T through the custom Cirrus Xi program and chose a color palette inspired by their passion for travel and hiking and featuring hues found in Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada, where they were married.



"You can't deny the ramp presence of the Cirrus and the fit and finish inside the cockpit," Ken said. "It has amazing performance and excellent technology, and the safety of the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS) is top-notch. Many instructors believe that the technology can be distracting at times, but all that information at your fingertips suddenly becomes incredibly helpful in making good cockpit decisions and resource management."

Ken explained that another reason for loving his Cirrus is the COPA community. He says that searching the forums and asking questions is easy and productive, particularly if there are specific

issues he is interested in. "The other thing I love about COPA is its in-person regional training events," he added. "I go to the COPA Pilot Proficiency Programs (CPPP) anytime they come to Florida and my schedule permits. And I will be heading to Scottsdale for my first COPA Migration in September."

One forum subject that caught Ken's attention was the discussion of long lines and wait times for new Cirrus aircraft. "I knew that as much as I was flying, I would eventually want a new plane. I am excited that I placed an order through the custom Cirrus Xi program."

Ken and his wife, Jennifer, who married in 2022, were inspired to personalize

their new plane based on elements they hold dear. They incorporated hues for the hull and fuselage in colors from their wedding venue at Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada. Other added design specs are based on their passions for hiking and travel and their connection to Angel Flight. They even included a paw print on the headrest to memorialize their dog, Romeo, who recently died. Their new G7 SR22T Cirrus should be ready for delivery this summer.

Where will they take that new airplane? Ken, who retired in August 2023, quickly said, "Probably off to Europe, Alaska and a loop around the Caribbean." ➤