

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

» Getting to Know COPA Pilots



Karen Seaton read about the Cirrus years before she actually sat in one. When she finally had the chance, it was enough to convince her to return to flying and now she owns her own Arrivée Special Edition SR22T.

CREDIT: MATT SHAW CREATIVE



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.

Karen Seaton Rises to the Challenge

by Laurie Einstein Koszuta

Years ago, Karen Seaton read an article about an aircraft manufacturing company with an innovative idea that she found intriguing. According to the piece, the company installed a whole-airframe parachute system in all its aircraft as an enhanced safety feature. With a father who had been a Navy aviator and later a 747 Northwest Airlines captain, Karen immediately wanted to share the story with him.

“When I told him about it,” Karen recalled with amusement, “My father just shook his head and said ‘that will never last.’ Of course, as we all know, it has lasted and Cirrus is that company.”

At the time, Karen, a pilot with multiple ratings, didn’t anticipate she would eventually own and pilot the very plane that had been the subject of that article.

“When I was in high school,” Karen said, “I decided to become a pilot. I didn’t know if I wanted to become an airline pilot or follow a corporate path, so I majored in Aviation Management at the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks.”

As part of the program’s curriculum, students were required to take flight lessons, and as a result, Karen earned her private certificate as an 18-year-old freshman. From September to May of her junior year, Karen interned as a flight coordinator

at FedEx in Memphis through the university’s co-op program. Her role was to support the operations of outbound flights. After her internship ended, Karen returned to UND for a summer semester before transferring to the aviation program at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Minnesota, where she completed her major.

With an aviation management degree, a private certificate and instrument, commercial and CFI ratings, Karen began working as a ground and flight instructor at Aero Services, Inc., at the Flying Cloud Airport (KFCM) in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. She was 24 years old.

“People would come into the flight school,” she chuckled, “and want to take a demo flight or sign up for lessons and then be surprised to see a young female instructor. I would see the look on their face, smile and tell them that I had been flying for six years. Sometimes, I felt like I had to work harder to gain their trust and acceptance.”

Karen earned her CFII rating in between instructing others at the school. She worked in Eden Prairie for a year before moving to Lincoln, Nebraska. While there, she signed up to take a weekend course offered by a flight school out of the Lincoln Airport (KLNK) where she added a multiengine rating to her already expanding number of certifications.

“The Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Nebraska, was under construction at the time,” Karen remembered. “I was flying a Baron 58P and became the primary pilot for that organization. I flew the manager from Lincoln, where he lived, to North Platte Airport (KLBF) on Monday mornings and then flew back on Fridays to pick him up. I also had the chance to fly Ben Crenshaw, the course designer, whenever he needed to be on-site.”

» **Since earning her pilot certificate** at the age of 18 and adding many ratings, Karen has shared aviation through volunteering in a variety of ways, from flying University of Nebraska’s football coach on recruiting trips to being part of granting Make-A-Wish Foundation’s wish.



CREDIT: MATT SHAW CREATIVE

While living in Lincoln, Karen was asked to serve on the Athletic Development Board at the University of Nebraska. “I knew that the most valuable thing I could offer that organization was my skills as a pilot. I volunteered my plane and time to fly Tom Osborne, the head Cornhuskers football coach, on his recruiting trips.”

“It was a major boon to help that way,” said Karen. “I even flew him down to the Orange Bowl several times. I had wondered if others wanted to get involved, so I asked aircraft owners and pilots if they would donate their aircraft and time. Many people stepped forward. The program is still ongoing, and I am proud to have started it.”

In 2000, Karen moved to Boulder, Colorado, known for its healthy

environment. It was what she needed after years of battling health problems that had unexplainable symptoms. For over 30 years, she had sought answers from doctor after doctor to learn the root cause. Among the many symptoms were perpetual tiredness, lack of energy and difficulty walking. At that point, it became painfully evident that her corporate flying career might be over, and she would face a life without aviation. However, in 2013, Karen found herself in a Denver doctor’s office with a definitive diagnosis – chronic and acute Lyme disease. “I felt like I was going off the rails,” she explained. “All I knew about Lyme disease was from a documentary I had seen, and it terrified me. The people I saw were chronic sufferers. I didn’t want that to be me,

so I begged the doctor for a different diagnosis. The doctor told me that he believed I had had Lyme disease for 35 years and that I would be OK.”

Shocked and angry by the diagnosis, Karen finally realized that she had answers to the questions she had been pursuing for years. The realization motivated her to shift her mindset and dedicate time to learning about the disease and its treatment. She went through months of antibiotic infusions, used an infrared sauna, incorporated daily juicing into her routine and made significant changes to her diet, cutting out caffeine, alcohol, sugar, dairy and processed foods. Her health gradually improved, and she felt better than she had in years.

Karen used her knowledge about good nutrition and began volunteering with organizations to teach others. She also

focused on raising her two daughters – Abby, born in 1999, and a second daughter, Grace, born in 2003. However, she deeply missed flying, and after being away from it for about 13 years, she began contemplating a return in 2015.

“I joined the Ninety-Nines,” said Karen of the international organization for female pilots, “to keep myself in the aviation world.” At one of the meetings, she learned about the National Intercollegiate Flying Association (NIFA), an organization dedicated to precision flying competitions for university aviation students.

“I wasn’t looking for a job,” Karen said when she discovered that nearby Metro State University (MSU) had a team. “I just wanted to volunteer to score landings at the airport and help with other needs. Within three months, two other coaches left for other jobs, and I became

a part-time affiliate instructor. It was a lot of work, but I did enjoy it.”

At one of NIFA’s national competitions in Columbus, Ohio, Karen saw a Cirrus, parked by the local training center, on static display on the ramp. “Unfortunately, the line was too long to go see it, but it reminded me of that article I read long ago about the Cirrus, and I wanted to learn more.”

The next day, after returning home to Denver from the competition, Karen called Independence Aviation (IA) at Centennial Airport (KAPA) and asked to take a closer look. When she arrived, the chief pilot took her to the hangar, and she climbed aboard a brand-new Cirrus SR22T. When the avionics lit up, she was sold and wanted to train immediately. She knew there would be a learning curve with the avionics because she had only flown corporate aircraft with



« Karen's two daughters enjoy flying with her and bringing along friends. Shown left, Karen's daughter Abby with her friend Dylan.

gauges. It didn't deter her. She started her transitional training in the SR20 and eventually moved to the SR22T. While training, she completed her flight review, instrument proficiency check (IPC) and a mountain course.

"My instructor thought that it might be good for me to get back into instructing," Karen said, "so I spent a lot of time in IA's simulator and just practiced and practiced. I ended up buying my own simulator (Flight1 Tech Advanced Aviation Training Device (AATD) equipped with the Cirrus Perspective+ G6 avionics). Since it is approved for flight training and currency, I created a business around it because so many people don't have access to a simulator."

After renting for about three years, Karen decided to purchase her own new SR22T. "I remember asking my sales rep how long the wait would be, and he said about six months to a year. However, I was able to buy an Arrivée Special Edition SR22T that was available in just six months."

When Karen was ready to take delivery in December 2021, she asked Ed Watters, a Platinum Cirrus Standardized Instructor Pilot (CSIP) whom she had met at a COPA Pilot Proficiency Program (CPPP) event, if he would be her instructor. He agreed and they met in Knoxville, Tennessee, for the delivery. Since Karen's airplane was not quite ready, Cirrus offered the use of another aircraft for four days. With Ed at her side, Karen flew left seat along the eastern corridor for the first three days. On the final day, Ed suggested that Karen 'teach him to fly' from the right seat.

"I told him I wasn't going to do that," Karen said with a laugh. "I finally asked if that meant I could tell him what to do, and he said 'you sure do.' He knew that it would be a terrific opportunity for me to learn ... and he was right."

Throughout her flying career, Karen felt a strong pull to give back and has flown many flights for the Make-A-Wish Foundation. She also established self-named scholarships at SCSU and MSU

so students could continue training for advanced ratings. Unfortunately, SCSU no longer has an aviation program, and while the MSU flight team is still in operation, she no longer has a scholarship there.

"The thing I like about owning a Cirrus is the ability to network with other pilots in COPA," Karen emphasized. "I get on the forums to learn about maintenance and solutions to different issues, and I like attending CPPP events because the CSIPs are mentors and have so much knowledge and experience."

In the end, the Cirrus has stolen Karen's heart in aviation. "My girls enjoy flying with me and bringing friends. One of my favorite times to fly is Saturday mornings. We often fly short hops, arrange a crew car, grab breakfast and fly home. That beautiful plane is just so magical." ☺

For more information about Karen's flight simulator business, SimClub by Kilo Sierra, visit <https://www.simclubbykilosierra.com> or email Karen at Simclub365@gmail.com.

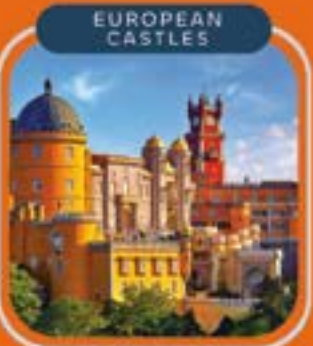


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