

# Strategies

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## Flying high



David Snell of Starlight Flights is hoping to cut into the relocation market currently dominated by helicopters.

### *Flying guides can help with relocations*

By C.J. FOGEL

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From all appearances, David Snell is a young man on his way up.

Just three years out of Louisiana Tech University with a bachelor's degree in aviation, the 25-year-old Dallasite works two jobs — one of which is running his own small business that's getting an increasing amount of media attention because of Snell's aggressive promotion.

Snell has long been marketing his flying service,

Starlight Flights, as a vehicle for engagement parties and romantic flights over Dallas. The result has been features on three local news broadcasts and a column in a suburban newspaper, not to mention about \$20,000 in extra income last year.

But as Dallas becomes a business magnet, he is betting that the future — and real money — is in relocation flight services, a market long dominated by companies that use helicopters. Snell has taken advantage of free ad space in

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## On his way up and over Dallas

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tenant newsletters for most downtown office buildings and is embarking on a two-month radio promotion to run on a local AM station.

"It's just waiting to happen if I reach the right people," he said.

So far, he's chipped his way into the site-tour market. Among his corporate clients is Discount Tire, which has used Snell's service to scout 20 to 25 store locations.

The biggest advantage to using airplanes for site research is cost. Special flights are available on request, but Snell has regular 30-minute and one-hour flights for three people that range from \$154 for an hour to \$119 for 30 minutes.

But companies that use helicopters don't seem to be all that worried that Snell could take a bite of their market.

At Zebra Air Inc. prices range anywhere from \$400 to \$550 an hour for a ride in an air-conditioned Bell Jet Ranger, a four-seat, turbine-powered helicopter. President Jamey Rhoades said safety and ability to get close to the ground are big differences.

"The single-engine turbine helicopter is statistically the safest mode of transportation next to the airlines," he said. "The other standpoint is we can be 500 feet lower to the ground than he can be legally. We can be closer to the ground so you can see more."

But Snell thinks airplanes are an underused alternative.

"People don't know that you can use airplanes to research sites," he said. "You say airplane and they think American, Delta, Southwest."

Snell doesn't own an airplane, but leases four-seat, high-wing Cessnas that provide 360-degree visibility. Flights can depart from either Addison Airport or Dallas Love Field. Starlight Flights has a sliding scale depending on the length of the flight and the number of passengers.

One of Snell's regular routes takes him over Texas Stadium, the Ballpark at Arlington, Eagle Lake and the Trinity River. On the romantic flights, champagne, cheese and crackers, and flowers or mistletoe can be included on request.

The planes fly as slow as 70 miles per hour at an elevation of 1,500 feet. Corporate clients have nothing but good things to say about using planes for site research.

"The noise level is far less, and I've experienced a smoother ride in an airplane," said Rick Sims, regional vice president of Discount Tire. "He's also capable of slowing the plane down to where you have ample time to look."

It wasn't long ago that Snell changed tires at Discount Tires. Now he's ready for his big break and gearing up for Valentine's Day.

"That's the next big season," he said.