

Thursday, December 9, 2004

## 'SLEIGH' RIDE



PHOTO COURTESY OF STARLIGHT FLIGHT

A Cessna 172 awaits passengers at Starlight Flight near Plano.

## TOURS OFFER SANTA'S VIEW OF HOLIDAY LIGHTS

BY A. LEE GRAHAM

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David Snell withstood 9/11 fallout, but now faces an even greater enemy.

"Christmas is going to be tough," said Snell, a Plano native, as he welcomed riders aboard his sleigh.

Actually, his "sleigh" – or sleighs – are three Cessna 172s parked at Addison Airport. The aircraft whisks clients skyward as Starlight Flight earns its wings.

Since 1991, the business has fueled Snell's income. So has recruiting high-tech employees and catering Cajun feasts, endeavors that consumed the multifaceted entrepreneur.

But productivity has taken a toll.

"I'm 35 going on heart attack," laughed Snell, whose latest challenge is meeting customer demand as Christmas arrives. "Christmas will mean lots of customers, but I can handle it."

The season promises holiday light tours, with passengers admiring neighborhood decor several thousand feet above terra firma.

"Between now and Christmas, it's 24/7," said Snell. "It gets busier every year as people find out about us."

Between 5:30 p.m. and midnight, his tiny fleet is expected to fly passengers over neighborhoods radiating a collective glow. "It looks amazing from the sky," said Snell, enamored of Plano neighborhoods as well as Interlochen in Arlington.

While SUVs slog through congested neighborhoods, Snell eyes them from above – and what he insists are the cheapest rates.

"Sometimes a flight school will offer these sorts of things, but not very many," said Snell.

When it comes to aerial tours, airplanes beat helicopters any day, he said.

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# Air tours view Christmas lights from above

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"They're also cheaper in operating costs. I don't know why. You'd think airplanes would be more expensive."

Couples wanting a half hour of Christmas magic must shell out \$130 to climb aboard one of Snell's airplanes. Hourlong journeys cost \$250, with a third passenger requiring \$15 more.

Whether skimming the Interstate 30 corridor or Collin County motorways, Snell always has his head in the clouds. It's been that way since graduating from Plano East High School.

Plans to study flight instruction changed when a newspaper ad caught his eye. It sought information technology recruiters, and Snell was hooked.

"Telecom had really taken off at that point, so I responded to the ad."

He served the industry for nine years, winding up at Data Pro in Dallas. When the tech bubble burst, Snell was prepared. He expanded an already growing catering business – Cajun Crawfish Co. – and pursued Starlight Flight with equal passion.

Both businesses have taken off, with the crawfish enterprise generating more than \$170,000 so far this year. Starlight also has seen success. From boyfriends making mid-air marriage proposals to executives showing off their latest land acquisitions, myriad customers have sought Snell's services.

An innate business savvy allows him to profit without much risk.

"It's how I survived when 9/11 happened," said Snell, referring to many flight companies that shuttered when FAA rules grounded such air travel. "I

don't own a thing; I rent. So there's no overhead expense of leasing or mortgage payments on an airplane."

Not one to put his eggs in one basket, Snell happily operates both enterprises.

"Hey, as long as demand for aerial tours continues to grow, I'll keep up – somehow."

Information on both businesses is available at [www.starlightflight.com](http://www.starlightflight.com) and [www.cajuncrawfishco.com](http://www.cajuncrawfishco.com).

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