



Executive Toys? Think Again!

BUSINESS AVIATION PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN HAITI RELIEF EFFORTS ▲

While general aviation has been getting bad press on a number of levels, JetQuest VP Robin Eissler has been quietly using it to save lives.

An industry veteran and a mother of three, Eissler has used every spare minute—and a lot she doesn't really have to spare—to coordinate relief efforts in Haiti since the January 12 earthquake. The results to date are astounding: over 700 flights that carried more than 3,500 passengers, including doctors, orphans, missionaries, reporters and dignitaries, and delivered in excess of 1,200,000 lbs. of critical supplies.

Using her business connections in the aviation industry, Robin co-founded an organization called C.A.R.E., Corporate Aviation Responding to Emergencies to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. She and now-

president Marianne Stevenson made contact through the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) Airmail online forum and began collaborating to provide relief in that disaster.

"In response to Hurricane Katrina [we] flew about 100 missions and moved approximately 1,000 people," Eissler said. "We prepared the organization to be ready for the next disaster, and then we waited five years...The earthquake in Haiti produced a situation that was the fundamental case for business aviation. It needed quick reaction, de-centralized response, and efficiency.

"Business aviation was the only entity that could do all three," she said.

While international relief efforts were still trying to get organized, CARE (not to be confused with the international relief organization by the same name) was warehousing

supplies in a hangar in Fort Lauderdale, and running medical supplies and doctors into Jacmel, a town around 25 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince.

1,500 RELIEF WORKERS

"In the first thirty days in Haiti, CARE put 1,500 [relief workers and medical personnel] on the ground. The Red Cross, with eighty million dollars that we all texted to them put 600 people on the ground," Eissler said, crediting the nimbleness of a small organization, the versatility of the fleet of aircraft—which ranged from a Cessna 206 to a Gulfstream V—and the generosity of the general aviation industry.

"If there's any reason I'm doing this, other than a love of humanity, it's because I want to right the public opinion about general aviation," she said. In the last twelve months,

the industry has paid a huge price for three car industry executives flying to Washington DC. Thousands of people have lost their jobs. The values of most business aircraft have dropped about 50 percent. The negative perception the public has of private aviation has crippled the most generous industry on earth," she said.

A lot of small and medium-sized companies have planes for the very reasons that they were effective in Haiti. Small planes can land on smaller strips. They can be loaded and off-loaded quickly, and their pilots can schedule flights at the spur of the moment. The Pilatus PC-12, a single-engine turboprop commonly used in rural areas, was the perfect plane for the mission in this case, Eissler said. Its unique configuration with a cargo door built into the side allowed CARE to get bulky medical equipment, such as generators and X-ray machines into hospitals and clinics that needed them. Twenty-nine of them were activated for this relief effort.

A Cessna Caravan also ran critical missions in the Leogane region, which was completely isolated from help. Eissler explained that according to local officials, a drug runner had used the road to land previously, and the pilot was willing to fly over and assess the possibilities. Once he determined that he could land on and take-off from the road, he flew 155 missions there delivering supplies, doctors, food and even gasoline for the hospital generators—siphoned from the tank of the plane.

There are countless stories of selfless giving and quick response that epitomize the users of private aircraft, Eissler said. As a result of NBAA's appeal for help on behalf of CARE, 400 aircraft were volunteered for the missions and more than 90 aircraft were activated, flying more than \$5,000,000 worth of flight hours.

Most of the jets stayed in the US and ferried supplies and personnel to Banyan Air, a general aviation facility in Fort Lauderdale. CARE also set up a warehouse for supplies in Santiago, Dominican Republic. A fleet of



ROBIN EISSLER

turboprops flew from both of those bases to all the outlying airstrips in Haiti including Jacmel, Pignon, Jeremie, Port de Paix and Les Cayes. "Our airplane that landed in Jacmel carried the very first relief supplies that region received," Eissler said. "And when our first airplane arrived in Les Cayes, the airport manager who helped unload the supplies had not eaten in four days."

During the course of the relief efforts CARE provided food, medical supplies and transportation for more than 20 orphanages. "We coordinated the flight that brought one of the first sets of 'partially adopted' children to be released from the country," Eissler said. "We coordinated this flight entirely through text messaging, and just in time. The orphanage where these children were living was down to less than 24 hours of food." With orphans leaving, there was more food left for the remaining children, which CARE replenished.

This was not the only instance where un-

reliable phone service necessitated the use of other technologies. "My command center was my iPhone," Eissler said. "There were even instances when the pilots would text me a list of what was on the plane so that we could file customs reports for them."

Even though she had to rely on friends and family to bring in meals, bathe her children and shove a pillow between her head and her desk upon occasion while her husband was traveling for business, Eissler doesn't regret a single minute she spent helping the earthquake victims. The morning of her interview for this article, she had arranged two different flights for a severely burned two-month-old and her mother to be transported to the Shriner's hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio, for treatment. The infant would have died in Haiti.

A CARE flight brought seven child amputees to the US for additional medical help the week before that. Video footage of that flight as well as other success stories are available on Corporate Aviation Responding in Emergencies (CARE)'s Facebook page.

Eissler and the other organizers plan to keep the organization and their fleet of volunteers ready for the next disaster. They also plan to set up an official entity to receive donations in the future, even if just for additional fuel. There are a number of companies that would continue to run relief into Haiti if they hadn't exhausted their fuel budgets, she said. The stories that have come from these efforts are compelling, humbling, heart wrenching and encouraging, Eissler said. "I wouldn't take back any moment of sleep I lost. I love it."

For more information contact
Robin Eissler: robin@jet-quest.com

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A VERSATILE CESSNA CARAVAN GETS AID TO THE OTHERWISE ISOLATED LEOGANE REGION