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UPDATE



Venturesome grad flying high

You could say Chris Holmes is living the dream life of any 26-year old Vancouverite — he's worked hard to find a job that lets him do what he loves, and his favourite moments are spent soaking up the beauty of supernatural British Columbia.

The difference between this BCIT Venture grad and others his age is that Holmes is President of Pacific Spirit Air, and the enterprising pilot has a bird's eye view from any of the planes he owns in his airline. In fact, Holmes has just added a Beaver float plane to his fleet to total three planes in all.

"I was 18 years old when I enrolled in the Venture program at BCIT," remembers Holmes. "A business opportunity presented itself and I had to act quickly — I knew I had to learn the ins and outs of developing a business plan."

That opportunity immersed Holmes in the Macintosh computer hardware distribution industry between 1991 and 1997. "I did very well in that business and in June of 1995 I was able to purchase my first baby: a Cessna float plane."



Chris Holmes, Venture program graduate.

Less than two years later, Holmes was spotted on the runway and soon after received a life-changing telephone call. "The man on the phone said to me, 'Hey, how would you like to own an airline?'"

The offer came from the owner of a small plane that serviced flights from Vancouver to the Gulf Islands. Not surprisingly, at first the young pilot wasn't

me practical, real-world skills to run my own business. If I went to university I would know a lot about theory. For an entrepreneur starting his own business, theory is not nearly as important as hands-on training."

"To develop a business plan you need a road map, and most importantly you need the skills to correct a problem when you get off track," he says. "BCIT taught me those skills and more."

A rapid name change to Pacific Spirit Air allowed him to start with a clean slate, and within the first year, Holmes' keen mind for business had doubled the company's profits.

Nowadays, Holmes' market is concentrated into four sectors: local Vancouver or Gulf Island commuters who live in the Gulf and work in Vancouver or who regularly retreat to the islands, tourists who fly to Vancouver and want to see more of the coastal region, corporate charters like B.C. Ferries whose employees often live on the remote islands, and herring roe fishermen who charter planes to

search out schools during peak season.

While Pacific Spirit Air does recognize three other airlines that provide similar scheduled service to the islands, he says his advantage is twofold:

"Because we are a smaller airline, we offer more flexible service and our customers tell us we are more friendly," he says. "Our pilots have the chance to really get to know our regular customers." Holmes says that if passengers want to fly right to their own docks or directly to a beach his pilots can easily accommodate.

"Our real niche, though, is our exclusive service to Silva Bay on Gabriola Island. About 44 per cent of our flights go directly to Gabriola because we provide the only air access to the island," he explains.

Holmes won't forget his BCIT roots that led him to the clouds. "I want to continue my involvement with BCIT because I think it's exciting to help shape the careers of future graduates."

— from Crystal Sawyer