

# YVR SKYTALK

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## Entrepreneur has office with a view

By Philip Raphael

While most people his age are striving to climb the corporate ladder to some day secure that high-rise office with the spectacular view, 26-year-old Chris Holmes can sit back and enjoy the scenery.

That's because his office chair is behind the controls of his own small floatplane operation — Pacific Spirit Airlines — and the ever-changing view out of the cockpit window is the breath-taking B.C. coastline.

So, just how does a youngster get into the airline business, own three planes and hire a staff of four part-time pilots? First, you drop out of school.

"In 1990, when I was 18, I left engineering at UBC after only one year. And I went into the computer business with a partner," he says adding that while his university stud-

ies ended, he began an intensive business program at BCTT.

"It was super-condensed — three months with no theoretical stuff, just things you'd need in the real business world," he says.

And it paid dividends as his company that distributed hard drives and other equipment for Apple computers went from first year revenues of \$30,000 to \$1.3 million two years later.

Just as earnings soared, so did Holmes' ambition as he took up flying as a hobby, earning his private licence in 1993. Two years later he

At 26 and the owner of his own airline, Chris Holmes is well on the way to charting his own future in the aviation industry with Pacific Spirit Airlines.



bought his own plane — a Cessna 180.

Why not? He had the money, time and the bloodline — his father is a 30-year veteran DC-10 pilot with Canadian Airlines International.

But things started to change and Holmes plotted a new course that followed his new-found hobby.

"The computer business started getting stale and the computer industry started to take a downturn, so I saw a good time to get out and I started looking for other opportunities."

That's when he made a deal to purchase a small airline which ferried passengers back and forth between the Gulf Islands and YVR's South Airport floatplane dock. He renamed

Pacific Spirit Airlines, and the transformation was complete. That was in 1997, when first year revenues were around \$350,000. Now Holmes has his sights set on pushing that bottom line up.

"I had my fun earlier on. I had the Porsche 944 when I was 22, I had a good time. Now, it's time for business," he says, bristling with confidence that leads him to predict doubling the company's revenue this year by expanding the fleet, offering more

routes and flights.

And while the business of flying is paramount in his world, Holmes says he still doesn't consider what he does a job, in the mundane sense of the word.

"I get a great deal of satisfaction out of what I do. It doesn't seem like work to me, getting up some mornings at 5 a.m. to get a flight out. It's a great sense of freedom being able to get into the plane and go out and not have to answer to anyone but myself." ✈