



Louisville's Jet Set

On the Trail of the Hundred-Dollar Hamburger

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On December 17, 1903, near Kitty Hawk, N.C., a couple of brothers named Orville and Wilbur Wright took the first sustained, controlled flights in a powered airplane. But they just missed doing something really important: inventing the hundred-dollar hamburger.

You see, after the brothers took their fourth flight that cold December Thursday, they briefly discussed flying into Kitty Hawk, four miles away. Since it was lunchtime, we can only assume they would have gotten a bite to eat. But a gust of wind dashed their plans—and their plane. So the invention of the hundred-dollar hamburger was left to some anonymous flyer on some unheralded day.

What, might you ask, is a hundred-dollar hamburger? It's what pilots call just about any meal you have to—or get to—fly an airplane to eat.

Louisvillian Jody Kirwan has eaten his share of hundred-dollar hamburgers, but he's quick to point out that the food is not the main attraction. "The whole reason it's so good is because getting there is more than half the fun. As opposed to just driving to a local restaurant and getting some food, you make an adventure out of it. You get in the plane and go and do the thing you love to do the most with people that you love," he said.

Taking your own plane also lets you avoid airport food, airport security, and airport layovers. And there's one more invaluable advantage: "The plane never leaves without you when you're flying it!" Kirwan said.

There's no doubt that Kirwan loves to fly. He flies three or four times a month, he's the president of the Glendale Flying Club, and the license plate on his 2002 Volvo reads "AV8OR."

But he might not love flying as much as Isaac Donovan does, however. Donovan owns Donaire Aviation and frequently uses his four planes for family vacations, trips to the beach, aviation summer camps and flying his pastor to speaking engagements. He's also a pilot for UPS.

"Flying is my hobby. It's also my passion. That's why after flying for UPS, which is my work, I fly privately," Donovan said. Flying his own planes lets him recapture the romance of flight, something he doesn't find in highly automated airliners.

Donovan grew up in the Caribbean, and he and his wife, Annetta, enjoy island hopping with their three children. "One of my friends got married, and we got dressed, hopped in the airplane, and flew right into the wedding from Grenada to St. Croix. That's over 500 miles," Donovan said.

Donovan is not alone among commercial pilots, either. Comair pilot Dave Parrish owns a Cessna 310, which he frequently flies to U of L basketball and football games. Parrish estimates that most of the people who have planes at Bowman Field work for UPS, Southwest Airlines or other commercial air carriers—even though commercial pilots usually get free-pass privileges on their own airlines.

"Theoretically, my family and I could go on a Delta airplane anywhere we want for free, but we opt for general aviation because of the convenience associated with it," Parrish said. "When you have two kids and all the luggage and car seats and diapers and you try to carry all that on an airplane, you'll say, 'Hey, I've got to find another way to do this.'"

Flying is more than just getting from Point A to Point B, of course. Wilbur Wright said it created a sensation of "perfect peace mingled with an excitement that strains every nerve to the utmost." His brother Orville said, "The exhilaration of flying is too keen, the pleasure too great, for it to be neglected as a sport."

If flying is a sport, it might seem to rank with the sport of kings. After all, a new private plane can easily cost a quarter of a million dollars.

But cost is not always the issue it appears to be, according to Kirwan. "You can buy an older plane and spend your money on avionics [electronics] upgrades and still get cheaper than a brand-new plane," he said. Safety isn't much of an issue either since the FAA requires stringent maintenance of all aircraft. "That's why planes from the 1920s and '30s are still flying," he said.

Pilots can also rent planes or join clubs like the Glendale Flying Club, thus sharing ownership and maintenance costs with other pilots. For example, Glendale charges members \$70 a month in dues plus \$55 to \$125 per hour for flight time in one of the club's four airplanes.

Of course, if you have to ask the price, maybe you can't afford it. Just like the hundred-dollar hamburger.