

ALASKA FLYER

Rob Stapleton, 907-727-2003, foto@alaska.net

New owner hopes to return Taquan Air to its glory days

By ROB STAPLETON

KETCHIKAN — The name's the same. So are some of the aircraft. They're even operating from the same address: 1007 Water Street in Ketchikan.

But those are the only similarities for Taquan Air, once the largest floatplane operation in North America, and perhaps the world.

"I purchased the rights to use the name, five airplanes and the buildings," said the new owner, Brien Salazar. "Other than that, it's a different operation."

Salazar, who also owns Venture Travel LLC in Ketchikan, purchased the rights to the Taquan Air name from the former parent company, Kootznoowoo Inc. Kootznoowoo, the Native corporation for Angoon, has an office in Juneau.

The original Taquan Air ran into financial trouble when its former owner, Jerry Scudero, approached Kootznoowoo about investing in AirOne, a start-up Part 121 operation.

AirOne purchased two British Aerospace Jetstream 32EPs and obtained its airline certification in late May 1998. It shut down Feb. 14, 1999, a year after announcing formation of AirOne as a regional Southeast Alaska airline.

AirOne issued press releases that stated the value of the company at start-up as \$4.5 million.

Scudero later said AirOne was in

jeopardy from the start when the certification process exceeded \$1 million and took more than a year to complete.

"This will be the last investment in a (transportation) business that this corporation will make as long as I am CEO," Kootznoowoo's Carlton Smith told the *Flyer*.

Declining ticket sales due to the collapse of the timber industry, the mainstay of Southeast Alaska, are also blamed for the operation's decline.

Salazar was charged as an officer of Taquan Air to reduce expenses, sell unused assets and reduce debt.

Scudero started Taquan Air in 1977 with a Cessna 185 and built the business from Metlakatla, on Annette Island. He eventually moved to Ketchikan. During its heyday, Taquan served 31 communities out of its Ketchikan base, and 12 communities from Sitka. It had a fleet of 27 aircraft on floats.

In 1997, Taquan boarded 243,000

passengers and moved more than seven million pounds of cargo and mail. At the time, Taquan was rated the second largest commuter airline in the state by the Alaska Journal of Commerce. Until its demise last December, Taquan employed 170 people.

Salazar hopes to pick up where the old Taquan left off. Using five de Havilland Beavers on floats, and many of the same pilots, the new Taquan Air will assume a three-year U.S. Forest Service aviation contract, and U.S. Postal Service contracts to serve Hyder, Behm Canal and Hydaburg.

An eventual Part 135 operation would provide charters, lake trips and flightseeing tours.

Salazar, a native of Ketchikan, grew up with a family operation, Ketchikan Air, that operated from 1966-97.

"We purchased the rights to the (Taquan Air) name from Kootznoowoo in hopes of building the business back up based on an established brand name that's recognized for meeting the demands and expectations of Southeast travelers," Salazar said.

"My dream is to revitalize the company."

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