

New airport manager pilot of aircraft and television series

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Dennis Brown involved in 'Northern Exposure'.

Gothenburg's new airport manager has accumulated 32,687 flight hours, has owned 52 helicopters and another 50 fixed-wing aircraft.

Dennis Brown and his wife Carol have lived in the Canadian Arctic, Alaska, Mexico, Guam, Wyoming and most recently, Estes Park, CO.

He also wrote the pilot for the popular television series Northern Exposure, based on characters he knew while operating a helicopter service out of Talkeetna, AK.

In the series, which was televised in the early 1990s, a New York City doctor tries to fit into the lives, culture and surrounding of people in the fictional town Cicely, AK.

While living in Talkeetna, Dennis kept a journal of the characters he met which he later sold to Hollywood writers.

Ten years later, the drama appeared on CBS and was wildly popular.

Of the eight main characters, only Chris—the radio broadcaster—was fictional, he said.

Several years later, the couple published a book about their adventures in Talkeetna Good Time.

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Dennis and Carol recently moved from Estes Park, CO, to Gothenburg where Carol's sister, Janice Janssen, lives and their mother is a resident of Hilltop Estates and Care Center.

On July 5, Dennis was hired by the local Airport Authority as manager and fixed-based operator. Carol is the bookkeeper.

He said he applied for the job because of relatives in Gothenburg. They also lived here in 2000 to care for Dennis's mother before she died. The couple also refurbished six homes locally.

"The only family I have is here and we've been here for the holidays," Dennis said.

The former bush pilot said he also likes the airport and wants to see it succeed.

Both he and Carol said they want to start a flying club and encourage kids to fly.

Dennis said 23 planes on the U.S. registry are listed in Gothenburg. Six are at the airport compared to 14 registered in Cozad.

"This is a special town and deserves a healthy airport," he said. "We have a world first-class golf course and manufacturing. Economically we're very well off."

As a result, the couple plans to host fly-ins, talk to young people about aviation and make some physical changes at the airport such as the construction of two more hangars and the paving and extension of a grass runway to accommodate larger aircraft.

"As soon as I get settled, I'll do some lobbying to get it done," Dennis said.

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He also proposes the offering of helicopter fuel on site.

Dennis grew up in Valley, where he received a pilot license at age 14. Carol was raised in McCook.

They met at Nebraska Christian in Central City and Dennis later attended Moody Bible College in Chicago, IL.

The couple worked as missionaries on a Cree reservation in Manitoba, Canada, before moving to Anchorage, AK, where Dennis flew explosives and supplies during the construction of the pipeline.

While in Talkeetna, they owned and operated Akland Helicopters Inc. from which Dennis made two life-saving rescues near the top of Mt. McKinley. One of the rescues, filmed by CBS and National Geographic crews, earned him a worldwide pilot-of-the-year award and a spot on CBS's Good Morning America show and inclusion in National Geographic magazine and a book.

At a Hollywood party, to which he was then invited, he met writers for the Cheers sitcom who bought his journal about Talkeetna.

Dennis and Carol also ranched and built a subdivision near Glenrock, WY, and lived for a year in Guadalajara, Mexico, before moving to Estes Park where they built condominiums and bought the Courtyard Shops.

They also lived in Denver, Newark, NJ, and Guam while Dennis was a pilot for Continental Airlines for 17 years before retiring in 2005.

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The Browns have three sons: foster child David Lee, who owns an air service in Talkeetna; Corwin Brown, chief of operations/antiterrorism for the U.S. Department of Defense; and Leslie Brown, a procurement officer in Colorado's Larimer County.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636