

in memory

Airline CEO & Missions Aviation Advocate Bruce R. Kennedy Completes His Last Flight

By Rick Wood

Bruce Kennedy, former CEO of Alaska Airlines and advocate of Christian missions, died June 28th in the tragic crash of his Cessna 182 in Cashmere near Wenatchee in Eastern Washington.

In 1991, after 32 years with Alaska Airlines, the last 12 years as the CEO, he shocked the corporate world by taking early retirement to devote his life to Christian service. He continued to serve on the board of directors of Alaska Airlines until his death.

He was credited with building Alaska Airlines into a world class airline with routes into California and Mexico, and retired at the very peak of his career. It was one of the strongest periods in Alaska Airline's history.

Bruce was an elder at John Knox Presbyterian south of Seattle and served the national church as a member of the General Assembly Council. He was in high demand for service on the boards of directors of national Christian agencies, and served with distinction on a number of them including Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). He served MAF as Chairman of the Board from 1991 to 1998 and helped them expand their role in technology and initiate numerous international partnerships.

MAF president Kevin Swanson said, "Kennedy didn't separate his faith from his professional, civic or personal life. His spirituality and the rest of his life were integrated, not compartmentalized. He was open about his faith, not forcing it on others, but was bold enough that people knew what – or more precisely, Who – he stood for. When he could have lived what he once called the 'blue-chip lifestyle,' Kennedy and his family lived in the same modest house for years. He didn't own a boat. He didn't have

a summer home. He gave time, talents and treasure to others."

Kennedy's final pursuit, says Swanson, combined his two greatest passions – his faith and his love of flying.

"He was at the forefront of the creation of Quest Aircraft Co. (www.questaircraft.com), a faith-based, donor-funded enterprise to design, build and certify the Kodiak, what many deem to be the next generation of bush plane for flying missions in remote areas of the world. MAF has been working closely with Quest in developing the Kodiak and placed the first order for 10 of the new aircraft," said Swanson.

The Kodiak is a 10-seat plane designed to carry heavy loads and land on short, rough landing strips. The biggest feature, however, is that it has a turbo-prop engine, so it can burn jet fuel (similar to kerosene) which is readily available most everywhere in the world and is reasonably priced. The high-octane aviation fuel, which all small airplanes use, is often very expensive or unavailable in remote areas of the world where mission planes fly. The Kodiak has recently been certified by the FAA and delivery of the first planes will begin this fall.

Every plane that Quest sells for commercial use will subsidize the cost of another plane for the mission field, so that MAF, New Tribes and other mission agencies can buy the planes at a reduced price.

The mission world has lost a real giant. When he retired from Alaska Airlines he said, "I wanted to move from success to significance." I think he did just that. We extend our condolences to all who knew and loved this great man and pioneer in aviation and Christian service. He is survived by his wife Karleen and their children Kevin, Karin and their families. You can learn more at his memorial website at <http://brucekennedy.memory-of.com/>

MAF quotes taken from an article by Michael Ireland of ASSIST News Service 🌐



Bruce R. Kennedy 1938-2007

Editor's Note: At Mission Frontiers we want to recognize the significant achievements that business people around the world are making every day in building the Kingdom of God. If you have a story of how business leaders are contributing to missionary work, outreach and social and economic development, please send your story to Rick Wood at rick.wood@uscwm.org.