

Women IN BUSINESS 2003



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Mary Schu

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Sunny skies are in the forecast for owner of Wings of the Cascades

Story by John Martin

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Mary Schu, the president and chief pilot of Wings of The Cascades Spirit Flight, Inc. flight school in Bend and Redmond, is thinking about buying another airplane. She's a little worried, though, about where the money will come from and the financial risk. Investing over a million dollars in a piece of equipment is enough to give anyone pause. But facing and overcoming fears is a process that Schu knows a few things about.

Mary Schu's Wings of the Cascades partners with Utah Valley State College to offer an Internet-based academic program, that coupled with her flight training, can provide students with an undergraduate degree. Women make up about 10 percent of her students.

Years ago, when Schu was first learning to fly, she would have to talk herself into going to her lessons. She would arrive at the airport hoping her instructor hadn't showed up or the weather was too bad to fly. So why did she make herself continue? Because, as she puts it, "once I'm up in the air, there's nothing like it." The price of having an incomparable experience was overcoming her fear of leaving the ground.

Long after she had become a pilot and was in business as a flight instructor she didn't believe she could ever own an airplane. She assumed that she would just go on renting other people's planes to teach her students. Finally, Schu took the big step, assumed the financial risk, and bought her own plane. Now Wings of the Cascades owns six aircraft, and

she's pondering the next addition to the fleet.

Schu holds a masters degree in education and spent the early years of her career teaching. Once she became a pilot, though, the attractions of flight lured her from teaching. She worked for years as a contract and corporate pilot, but along the way she found that she couldn't completely do without teaching, either. She has been a flight instructor at the Cessna Learning Center in Kansas and elsewhere. At Wings of the Cascades, which is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Schu feels that she can do the two things she loves best — fly and teach.

When she moved to Central Oregon a decade ago, Schu did so with two young daughters. As a single parent, she had to find ways to balance family and career even through the

hectic years of establishing her own business. Now, with one daughter on her own in Salem and the other one with their father in Kansas, Schu can devote as much time as she wants to Wings of the Cascades. That means her days start at 6 a.m. and end about 8 p.m., unless it's an evening when she's teaching a ground school class. Those days she finishes up at 10 p.m. And Saturdays? Well, she works Saturdays now. But she wouldn't do it if she didn't love it.

One of the things Schu appreciates about being a flight instructor in Central Oregon is the excellent weather we have for flying. With our generally dry and clear conditions there are very few days when her planes are grounded. There's a side benefit in that fact for Schu: It

