

Del. pilot gives needy a lift

This 'angel' needs no wings. His love of flying, and his helicopter, provide the means to lend a helping hand.

BY JENNIFER ZEBERKIEWICZ
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Normally, a midlife crisis doesn't help save many people's lives. For Dr. Neil Kaye, a psychiatrist who lives in Pike Creek, he turned what he considered his midlife crisis into something positive.

Although he jokes about his new hobby as a midlife crisis, getting into flying was something he decided to do just four years ago.

"I heard some ads on the radio for introductory lessons, and it sounded interesting to me," he said.

"I never had an interest in airplanes. I considered them hot little boxes you can't see out of. They serve a purpose, that's all. But helicopters fascinated me because they are so much more challenging, and physicians love challenges."

An avid traveler already, with a second home on Tangier Island, Va., in the Chesapeake Bay, he thought a helicopter would be great because of its ability to go from point to point.

"I could land on front yards of friend's houses and go exactly where I want to go," he said. "I use my back yard to land my helicopter on Tangier. It's great."

That convenience of getting in and out of small places without the need for an airport has helped Kaye make people's lives easier and earned him a mid-Atlantic Pilot of the Year honor from an organization called Angel Flight.

Shortly after hearing the radio ads and deciding to take flying lessons at Horizon Helicopter's flight school in Newark, Kaye discovered some brochures about Angel Flight. It is a nonprofit organization that provides charitable medical air transportation for the financially needy. Its mission is to ensure access to flight transportation for those who require long-distance medical care.

Although his career in psychiatry helps people, Kaye wanted more. "Angel Flight was something I had read in an article before, about corporate jets taking kids for cancer treatments," he said. "I thought it was a terrific organization, and it would be great to be a part of."

Just like all pilots interested in the program, Kaye signed up and had Angel Flight check his credentials. Then, once a week, he gets an e-mail about all flights that are needed in the mid-Atlantic area. When he can perform a flight he responds and does the job.



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When not in his Pike Creek office, Neil Kaye can sometimes be found using his helicopter to take patients to get their medical treatments.

PROFILE

AGE: 47

RESIDENCE: Pike Creek

FAMILY: Wife, Susan, a physician

OCCUPATION: Psychiatrist for 21 years

HOBBIES: Flying his helicopter, cooking, gardening, traveling

"The headquarters coordinates everything," he said. "As volunteer pilots, we provide the needed transportation and fuel for the ride."

Last year, Angel Flights performed 50,000 flights. Kaye typically logs about 200 hours each year in his Robinson R-44 helicopter. He said he likes to do at least one flight per week. Most Angel Flight pilots fly airplanes and are able to do long runs. Angel Flight can coordinate several pilots for a run between Wilmington to California. Several pilots perform one of the legs for the needed flight.

Kaye's helicopter has helped several of his neighbors on Tangier Island get to medical treatment. The remote island has frequent bouts of inclement weather, which often interfere with some of the residents' medical appointments. One such person is Tangier Island resident Vanessa Dise, who is a diabetic and requires dialysis treatment. Kaye said he flies Vanessa the most often and knows about her whole family.

"With Angel Flight, I get to know the people I fly very well, and it's really rewarding to see them get substantially better," he said.

Since Kaye began helping Vanessa and her husband, Larry, with her transportation to her dialysis center, the "driving" time has gone from two hours to a 10- to 15-minute helicopter flight. "Recently Vanessa broke her pelvis, and being in a helicopter has been a significant improvement in comfort instead of a jarring boat ride followed by a lengthy car ride," Kaye said.

"He's an angel," said Larry Dise. "He's been very good to my wife and has made her situation a whole lot easier. Before when she had to travel by boat, she'd leave at 8 a.m. and not be home until 6 p.m. Dr. Kaye makes it so much easier. She leaves by 9:30 in the morning and is home by 3 in the afternoon."

"We've met other Angel Flight pilots, and the whole program is great. They really help a lot of people," Dise added.

Another person who has improved from Angel Flight is Kaye himself, who said, "I get to meet people and do something I love to do -- fly -- so I feel like I'm not really giving but getting. By helping someone's life be a little easier, I get this great feeling."