

UNIVAIR AIRCRAFT CORP. CELEBRATES 64 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE AVIATION COMMUNITY

By Mike Sellers

On February 25, 2010 Univair will celebrate 64 years of being part of the aviation community. The question has been asked over the years “How did you decide to get in the business that you are in?” Simple question but the answer is not all that simple. There were a series of many decisions that evolved over a number of years that brought us to where we are today.

In 1945 J.E. “Eddie” Dyer, the grandfather of Univair’s current owner and president, Jim Dyer, was released from the U.S. Army Air Corps and came to the Denver area looking for some sort of a living in the airplane business rather than returning home to Missouri. Eddie teamed up with fellow veteran and well respected Denver area aircraft salesman, Don Vest. . In February 1946 Eddie Dyer and Vest formed the Vest Aircraft Company. This new organization would eventually become Univair Aircraft Corp.

The new company offered CAA and GI Bill approved flight instruction from ground school through advanced instrument training. Don Vest managed the aircraft sales and flight department while Eddie Dyer organized and operated a maintenance and repair facility.

The Vest Aircraft Company began operation at Hayden Field in a now industrialized area of east Denver. Upon their arrival, the airport was renamed Vest Field. Soon after the establishment of the company, it was apparent that the business had outgrown the Vest Field facilities. Eddie Dyer began a search for a new location for their company. Vest Aircraft Company relocated to Sky Ranch Airport northeast of the Denver suburb of Aurora in early 1953 and remained there until 1971.

In the years right after WWII through the mid 1950s, many light plane manufacturers suffered from a glut of aircraft for sale and a post war market that never materialized. They subsequently were bankrupted and went out of business. There developed the need for a reliable source of replacement parts. Eddie Dyer realized there was a great need to support the civilian aircraft industry which included many of these recently “orphaned” aircraft. Eddie evaluated the nationwide potential for business and established a salvage yard at Sky Ranch Airport. Wrecked and damaged aircraft were purchased and disassembled for useable parts. The used aircraft parts division filled a need and became very successful, but it soon became evident that the aircraft salvaged business alone would not supply sufficient replacement parts. New manufactured parts would be necessary to keep the fleet of Post-War aircraft flying.

In the early ‘50s, there were two divisions of Vest Aircraft, the aircraft sales division, and the Aircraft Repair and Parts Division. With the parts division expanding, J.E. Dyer established a separate aircraft parts manufacturing and maintenance company, Universal Aircraft Industries in 1956. The new Universal Aircraft Industries Manufacturing Division purchased the manufacturing right, tooling and remaining inventory for several bankrupted post-war aircraft manufacturers including; Ercoupe, Taylorcraft, Swift and the Stinson 108 series aircraft. They also purchased the Flottorp and Aeromatic line of propellers.

In 1958 the Federal Aviation Act was enacted. Among the many things the Act did was to establish the procedure for parts manufacturing approvals and the manufacture of FAA certified replacement aircraft parts. Universal immediately responded to these new demands and received some of the first FAA Parts Manufacturing Approvals (PMA approvals) issued under the authority of the new Federal Aviation Administration.

On April 25th 1963, Eddie Dyer died. Unwilling to see Eddie's hard work destroyed, Veda Dyer, Eddie's wife, took the reins of the company after his death. In the 17 years prior to Eddie's death, he had taken the company from an obscure aircraft maintenance facility to a world-renowned parts manufacturing company. The Universal Aircraft Industries name was shortened to the current registered trade name of Univair Aircraft Corp. in August 1965.

Veda became General Manager and CEO of Univair Aircraft Corporation. Under her capable management, the company continued to expand its presence in support of the worldwide light aircraft industry. In her 11 years as CEO, she set the course which Univair follows today.

In the early 1970s, the cities of Denver and Aurora began encroaching the Sky Ranch Airport. There was talk of the sale of the property, closing of the airport and industrial development. Steve Dyer, Eddie and Veda's son, took on the project of moving the company to a new facility just off the airport property in 1972. This is where the company has remained for the last 38 years.

Veda retired in 1976. Steve Dyer took command of Univair as General Manager and CEO. In the 30 years under Steve's watch, the plant has grown from 44,000 sq. ft. to 62,000 sq ft. after a major expansion in 2003. Under Steve's leadership, Univair holds more PMAs for out-of-production light aircraft than any other company in the United States.

Currently, Univair owns three aircraft Type Certificates; one for the Stinson 108 series and two for the Ercoupe series. One for the two earliest models of the Ercoupe and the other Type Certificate covers the later models of Ercoupe the Forney, Alon and the M-10 Cadet. Univair holds thousands of PMAs for Aeronca, Champion, Citabria, Decathlon, Scout, Cessna, Luscombe, Piper and Taylorcraft.

Decisions on what parts to make are based on a number of factors. Is there enough demand? What is the aircraft fleet size? Can Univair make the part? How hard will it be to get the necessary testing, inspections and reports together for the FAA Design Approval? Are raw materials available and reasonable to purchase? And, after dealing with all the expense of making the part, can it be brought to market at a price the market will still want? Some customers call here thinking that all Univair has to do is go make the part and write the part number on some official FAA clipboard and that's all there is to getting a PMA. It would be great if it worked that way, but the real process is slow and expensive.

In the case of the Ercoupe and Stinson 108 series, Univair is fortunate to have most of the original engineering and tooling. Many of our customers have assumed or have been led to believe that we also have the Type Certificates, engineering and tooling for all the older aircraft

we support including the older Pipers. Unfortunately, this is not so. However, the Piper inventory is one of Univair's largest. Over the years, Univair has been able to purchase a few foreign military inventories and numerous parts directly from Piper or their distributors. However, most new Piper parts have been added to the Piper line by the PMA process. Univair must do all the necessary work to make them one part at a time. It is a slow process of drawing up blueprints, doing engineering reports, making tooling, inspecting and working the paperwork through the FAA, but Univair has been doing it for the better part of 64 years. After a while, it all adds up to several thousand parts.

Jim Dyer maintains the legacy left by his grandfather Eddie, grandmother Veda and his father, Steve Dyer. Steve Dyer has seen the company evolve from being housed in a half dozen war surplus hangars and various outbuildings to a new specific built facility. There has been huge leaps in technology with the equipment being operated today compared to what Eddie Dyer had to work with. Currently, Univair operates two CNC vertical milling centers, one CNC laser center, one CNC High Definition plasma tube contouring machine and two CNC press brakes. Today, Jim Dyer, the third generation of the family, is maintaining the family commitment to keeping these older airplanes flying with a blend of craftsmanship and CNC technology.

Jim assumed the leadership of the company in 2006. Shortly before taking that position, he was involved with the acquisition of the company's first presence outside the Denver area. In 2005, Univair purchased F. Atlee Dodge Aircraft Service in Anchorage, AK. Atlee Dodge was a long time part of the Alaska aviation community and had established a firm that manufactured parts. They had obtained a large number of STC and PMA approvals on parts for use on several makes and models of aircraft seeing routine and demanding service in Alaska and Canada. Dodge's parts were well accepted by the aviation community because of their innovation and quality. F. Atlee Dodge Aircraft Services, LLC continues to operate in Alaska and serve that aviation community in much the same fashion that it did while building up the reputation it presently enjoys. Their products have made an important contribution to the total Univair product line and their employees share the same commitment in serving the aviation community that Univair has.

The Dyer family's leadership and vision has been vital in the company's success. However, Steve Dyer has stated many times that the success of the company is not due to his efforts alone. Without the hard work and dedicated effort of many employees over the years who cared about their work and the welfare of the company, none of this would be possible. Univair has made an effort to recognize and reward these individuals. Consequently, about 50% of the employees have been with the company for more than 10 years. About 37% of the employees have more than 15 years of service and roughly a half dozen have been with the company for more than 25 years. Univair also has one employee with over 50 years with the company. About 20% of the staff are pilots and fly aircraft which Univair supports.

One of Univair's greatest assets is the collective knowledge of its employees.

Mike Sellers is the Marketing and Sales Manager at Univair. He comes from an aviation family and has been at Univair for 31 years.