

AVIATION STORY

Real estate mogul Ed Robson buys land, builds homes and enjoys flying.

Nearly 60 years ago, a young man with big dreams moved his wife and 3 children from Arlington MA to the deserts of the southwest United States.

With only \$1400 in his pocket, he arrived in Phoenix with capabilities far more valuable: ambition, drive and tenacity. Traits that this former Marine pilot and Olympic hockey player would draw upon to overcome the obstacles he faced.

Over the next 6 decades, Ed Robson would rise from obscurity to become one of the most successful and influential real estate developers in the country.

After some ups and downs, in 1972 he opened his first big project. It was on 2560 acres of farmland on the outskirts of Phoenix that Robson broke ground on Sun Lakes. Initially selling double-wide mobile homes, his master-planned community eventually blossomed into a town in and of itself.

On-site-built homes supplanted the mobile homes and were joined by retail shops, golf courses, and medical offices. Along the way, Robson bought out his partners to become the sole proprietor. This was just the beginning. In the years that followed, Robson Communities would open 6 more locations spread across Arizona and an additional community just outside of Dallas TX.

Robson buys Citations

Ed Robson's success and expansion led to an even greater need for travel, but the means had to be convenient and effective from a business standpoint. In the late 1970s, Robson purchased a Cessna Citation Bravo. For many years he stuck with the Cessna brand, going through a succession of Citations including a II, a V (one of his favorite planes), and a VII.

In 2000, Robson seized an opportunity from his now-deceased mentors' company. The Del Webb corporation had decided to sell their flight operations and Robson bought the whole Scottsdale-based package: plane, hangar and pilots.

This time the plane was a 1-year-old Hawker 800XP. He enjoyed the aircraft but wanted something bigger, so he moved on to a Dassault Falcon 2000, then later to a Falcon 2000EX, which he purchased new in 2008 and still currently operates.

While the success of Ed Robson and Robson Communities is clearly the result of the business acumen of its founder, he does give credit and appreciation to the value of aviation. "There are many areas that business aviation has benefited me," Robson explains.



Robson Communities Founder & Chairman Ed Robson and his wife Karrin Taylor Robson with the company's Falcon 2000LX.

“It improves the company morale, it gives us flexibility, and it gives us time. It allows my people to do their job then go home at night, no matter where they need to be during the day.

People are proud to work for this company and the aircraft is one thing that adds to that feeling.” Known for his generosity to the community in the form of his extensive philanthropy, Robson also frequently takes employees and clients on team-building trips. “Having an aircraft like this is expensive. But it makes us even more productive,” he adds.

They currently fly approximately 200 hours a year, with 20 to 30% of that being international destinations. While Robson will sometimes use the aircraft for personal flights, its primary purpose is for the benefit of the business. Wible explains, “With our communities not only around Arizona but also in Texas, the plane allows us the opportunity to view new development possibilities, enhance customer relations, meet with potential new partners, and conduct on-site management.”



Falcon 2000LX.

Robson also operates a few large boats and associated business ventures which necessitates flights to both coasts for operational needs as well as morale-boosting reward trips for employees and customers.

Robson’s well-known philanthropy is not only for the benefactors of his many contributions but for those close to him. Wible tells the story of Robson’s accountant whose wife broke her hip while on vacation in Hawaii. Robson did not hesitate to send his plane, staffed with medical personnel, to pick them up and bring them home for treatment and recovery. “That’s just the way he is. Ed recognizes his good fortune and is always willing to share it with others.”

Ed Robson has made it clear that he has every intention of continuing with a flight department, even as others have closed theirs in recent years. His appreciation for Dassault products is also not a secret. When pushed on the matter, both Robson and Wible show a preference for something a bit larger than their 2000LX, which is now a decade old and due for replacement. Robson likes the 7X but feels that it is too much aircraft for their needs. Wible feels that a Falcon 900LX may fit the bill and they are keeping their options open.

Conclusion

Throughout his life, Ed Robson has faced trials and triumphs, both personal and professional. He battled polio only to become an Olympic hockey player. His first planned community faced bankruptcy on more than one occasion only to turn around and become the catalyst for a real estate empire that more than 50,000 people call home.

The one constant has been Ed Robson and his unwavering drive to overcome and achieve. *Outrageous Good Fortune* is the title of his autobiography and in it, he states, “Knowledge is power.” During his tenure as one of Arizona’s great land developers, he has recognized the value that business aviation offers to his many ventures and that knowledge has proved to be truly powerful.

With his wife, former employee of the Reagan White House and current AZ Board of Regents Member Karrin Taylor by his side, a state-of-the-art aircraft in his hangar, and a top-notch flight crew in the cockpit, Ed Robson has assured the tremendous success of Robson Communities will continue.