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\$1m Cargo Carrier 'Makes Some Waves'

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A Bahamian-owned cargo airline yesterday said it had "made some waves" since getting approval to enter the Florida market in January, and is now leveraging technology to expand its \$1 million investment.

Captain Christopher King, Junkanoo Air's president, said the two-plane carrier was using its Bahamian knowledge and certifications to further its "competitive edge" over rivals.

Apart from being authorised to transport hazardous materials, Junkanoo Air is employing the Internet and a planned electronic tracking system to attract customers to its service.

"We want to take back some of the flights from foreign carriers," Captain King told Tribune Business. "We're open to offering our clients a little more than they can right now.

"We have a competitive edge on our rivals. We have a more technically advanced system. Our clients are able to book cargo flights through the website, and are developing a live tracking system for customers to follow their shipments right through to Nassau, like UPS. That will give them more confidence in our ability."

Captain King added that his fledgling airline also planned to connect Nassau and the Family Islands, taking goods both ways.

In particular, he emphasised that Junkanoo Air was offering to bring straw work and carvings from the Family Islands to Nassau and international markets, thereby enabling the Bahamian crafts industry's growth.

"In the not too distant future, we hope to acquire larger aircraft," Captain King added, "something that can go the distance, take goods out of the country to nations such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and bring goods out. You have a lot of different nationalities here that want to send goods back to their families."

Junkanoo Air, which operates two Chieftain Navahoe aircraft, has been operational for just over one year. Yet its business received a major boost to its expansion plans in January, when the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) gave it permission to start flying into Florida.

The airline now makes at least one flight a day into the so-called 'Sunshine State', with Captain King - a 16-year aviation industry veteran, who has been flying for 12 of them - saying business to-date had exceeded expectations.

"I was just really looking at the models that were out there, and thinking of new ways to better cargo services," he told Tribune Business of the motivation for starting his own company. "To me, they were not adequately serviced, and most of the airlines that bring cargo here are foreign.

"Business has been fairly decent. Right out of the gate, everyone was pretty much driven to the new business. We've been able to make some waves in the market.

"For a start-up, we weren't expecting this. It really has exceeded our expectations, but that's a driving force for us to do even better."

Prior to getting its US approvals, Junkanoo Air was providing cargo services around the Bahamian islands, and also to nations such as Haiti and Turks & Caicos.

Captain King said the company was seeking business from both the Bahamian public and local freight forwarders, and looking to exploit its ability to directly service the Family Islands.

The Tribune