Smooth Takeoff

Timothy Neubert ('86, '87, WW) capitalizes on airport friction, sharing profit and experience with Embry-Riddle

BY KELLY CUCULIANSKY PRATT

The sun hadn't yet risen when Timothy Neubert ('86, '87, WW) demonstrated a pavement friction tester at Reno-Stead Airport, just hours before the 46th National Championship Air Races in Nevada.

Though Neubert didn't close a sale that day, his air racing team, Invictus, found no resistance when its Cassutt IIIM took off across the smoothest section of the runway. Minutes later his team celebrated a first-place finish in the Formula One Gold race.

Neubert says a "multitude of events" likely contributed to the 2009 win. But his advice to the pilot regarding the airstrip's friction conditions didn't hurt either. "I told him that if he could just start two feet in, that surface would be super slick because it's the most common run area where airplanes had landed," Neubert says. "Whether or not it was the factor that led us to win, I'm not sure. But it definitely gave us an edge."

Searching for an "edge" in the pavement business has become

AIRCRAFT: COURTESY OF NAC JET RACING TEAM; NEUBERT: DARYL LABELLO

Tim Neubert's air racing team, Invictus, started as a way to advertise his business. A regular contender on the race circuit, the Cassutt IIIM finished fourth in the Gold jet class in the 2013 Reno Air Races.

a theme for Neubert since he launched his company, Neubert Aero Corporation (NAC), in 1998. The racing team, which competes regularly, came later as a means to creatively advertise the business. During the 2013 Reno Air Races, Team NAC placed fourth in the Gold jet class. While he doesn't always finish in first place in the races, or in business, Neubert says it's a great ride.

That ride is now global. A deal he signed in 2011 with the Turkish airport authority signaled NAC's entry into the worldwide market. Neubert describes the experience as a complex adventure that nonetheless ended with the successful sale of 32 of his patented Dynamic Friction Testers—one of 10 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved friction measurement devices.

"Being able to do a job like that really taught me a lot," he says. "When you're a small business and you're trying to get started, there's a lot you don't know. That's what I wish I could do now—help other businesses find the right paths," says Neubert, who holds a Master in Business Administration and teaches international business and economics at the University of Tampa.

Looking Up

Like many Embry-Riddle graduates, Neubert had a passion for flight as a child. Growing up in Erie, Pa., baling hay and working in a doughnut shop, he figured the U.S. Air Force was his ticket to becoming a pilot. But when he was assigned to the ground support crew at Luke Air Force Base, he knew he had to find a way out of that hot Arizona sun. He started taking flight lessons at a local aero club and attending Embry-Riddle Worldwide courses on base. A class in airport management and accident investigation persuaded him to pursue a series of airport executive jobs after finishing his time in the Air Force.

While working as the assistant airport director of the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Airport, Neubert, an instrument-rated pilot, found himself questioning why the market wasn't supplying better products to airports. When he couldn't find them, he would invent them—and NAC became his answer. He has since used the company to market several of his inventions and re-engineered products, which include airport barricades, friction testers, a dynamic friction decelerometer, and geographic information system software.

Timothy Neubert

Making an Impact

Helping industry peers has been top of mind for Neubert since 2006, when he founded the International Friction Pavement Association, a membership group that also provides a certification program. Based at the Hernando County Airport Industrial Park in Florida, the organization connects individuals in the friction evaluation business with the latest industry information and educational workshops and shares research with the FAA to assist the agency with future airport runway safety standards. Neubert is also a member of ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) International's Committee E17 for Vehicle-Pavement Systems standards.

Soon Neubert's support will extend into the next generation of civil engineers at Embry-Riddle, who could also make a difference in those standards. As Embry-Riddle's Civil Engineering Program marks its 20th anniversary this fall, it also celebrates the creation of its first-ever endowed scholarship: The Timothy W. Neubert – Neubert Aero Corporation Endowed Scholarship for Civil Engineering.

"The scholarship will undoubtedly impact the lives of our civil engineering students for years to come," says John Weavil, professor and department chairman. "Mr. Neubert is a successful entrepreneur and is an example of an alumnus who not only gives back to the community but has a deep appreciation for his education and a strong desire to support the university."

For Neubert, it's an investment in the future of aviation, too.

"The pilot and airplanes need to land on something and I think there are materials and design solutions that can be engineered to make runways more affordable to use and longer lasting," he says.

His hope is that Embry-Riddle students will lead this effort.