Leisure International Airline turns heads in the leisure industry with its virtually new Airbus A320s, one of the most automated airplanes in the world. The Winston-Salem-based charter airline also has strong ties to the former Piedmont Aviation. Four of its five founding officers are alumni of the well-liked carrier.

New Leisure Air firm invests in living up to its Piedmont legacy

By BERNIE KOHN
Staff Writer

WINSTON-SALEM — Leisure Air talks, acts and even looks a little like Piedmont Aviation — and doesn't mind a bit when people notice.

"Piedmont was a gentle airline, for lack of a better word," reminisced C.D. McLean, chief operating officer of the 5-month-old charter airline and a former international captain at Piedmont. "There was an aura about the service. That's what we're trying to do — have a caring airline."

Leisure Air is a working Piedmont alumni association — which explains why the airline, with no service out of Winston-Salem, chooses to be based there.

Four of its five founding officers, and its entire dispatch department, worked for Piedmont. Its office at Smith-Reynolds Airport is in what used to be the Piedmont Sky Club. Piedmont memorabilia adorn the otherwise bare cubicles and walls. Much of the dispatch room came from Winston-Salem investors.

Local Piedmont retirees frequently help out the 100 employees on special projects, and Tom Davis, Piedmont's legendary founder, stops in once a month or so to see how things are going.

Leisure Air officials beam when they talk about incidents like when a pilot stepped outside during a Detroit snowstorm to help a mechanic change a tire. McLean said this kind of spirit is what helped Piedmont attain its high level of customer loyalty throughout the South.

The effort wouldn't matter, of course, if Leisure couldn't find a niche in a business that has proved just as tough as the scheduled airline business. So far, however, its executives say Leisure's profits have shown they are onto something.

Leisure Air's concept came from the mind of former PeopleExpress Pilot Richard Walker checks some of the controls in one of the highly sophisticated Airbus A320 airplanes Leisure operates on charter flights.
Leisure Air flies with a public good in mind.

Leisure Air, founded in 1973, offers a unique approach to air travel. The airline focuses on providing a public good experience for passengers, aiming to make air travel more accessible and enjoyable. With a fleet of dedicated charter aircraft, Leisure Air caters to small groups, ensuring personalized service and a more intimate travel experience. The company's philosophy is to operate with integrity, offering competitive pricing and a commitment to customer satisfaction. Whether it's a short getaway or a significant event, Leisure Air aims to exceed expectations, making every journey a memorable one for its passengers.