



CASE STUDY

WHEN LIFE IS ON THE FLIGHT LINE

Thornton Aviation supports Sea Aviation's life-saving organ transplant missions

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MICHAEL HARKINS, SEA AVIATION

For one on-demand aviation operation, aircraft availability is measured in far more than dispatch reliability. Its Hawker 800XP aircraft are used primarily to move organs, doctors and medical teams across the country for transplant missions—flights where every minute matters and the aircraft must be ready when the call comes.

The company currently operates two Hawker 800XPs, with a third aircraft planned and a long-term goal of expanding the fleet to as many as 10 aircraft. Supporting that growth—and the life-saving missions behind it—requires a maintenance partner who can respond quickly, communicate clearly and help keep downtime to an absolute minimum.

MISSION PROFILE: READINESS FOR TIME-CRITICAL MEDICAL FLIGHTS

The operation’s aircraft support transplant logistics nationwide, transporting organs and medical personnel to destinations where timing is critical. A typical mission may begin with a sequence of updates shared across the team: the organ has been removed, accepted, delivered to the aircraft, loaded and launched. Once the aircraft lands, the organ and medical team continue on to the receiving hospital.

“Everything is time critical,” said Michael Harkins, aircraft asset manager. “You see all this play out step by step. The aircraft fires up, they get where they need to go, and hopefully you save a life in the process.”

In this environment, maintenance is not simply a scheduled requirement. It is a mission-enabling function. Harkins monitors inspections, flight discrepancies and upcoming maintenance needs with one objective: keep the aircraft available for the next call.

Sea Aviation’s hangar is located next to Thornton Aviation at Van Nuys, allowing their team to respond quickly when scheduled inspections, post-flight needs, weekly inspections or AOG events arise. That proximity, paired with a highly responsive team, has become essential to keeping the aircraft mission-ready.

Thornton Aviation supports the fleet with day-to-day maintenance, scheduled and unscheduled work, inspections, AOG response and upgrades, including a Wi-Fi upgrade on one of the aircraft. For Mike, the value of the relationship is defined by responsiveness, communication

AIRCRAFT:

Hawker 800XP

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Scheduled maintenance
- Flight line readiness
- Pre and post flight inspections

by responsiveness, communication and the willingness to solve problems under pressure. When life is on the flight line, there’s no time to waste.

“Their communication is fantastic,” Mike said. “They’re calling me, texting me, emailing me—whatever it takes. I always know the status of the airplane or the inspection.”

That communication extends beyond normal business hours. In one time-critical situation, an aircraft needed



The Sea Aviation team provides full-service medical transport solutions.

immediate attention late at night while an organ was already on its way. Mike began calling everyone he could reach – at 2 am. Thornton Aviation's team responded, addressed the issue and the aircraft launched within minutes.

"Hector Jimenez, Thornton Aviation's director of maintenance, went in and took care of the situation," Mike said. "Ten minutes after he completed it, the plane launched. It was that critical. We were that close to missing a flight."

Another example came when Thornton Aviation technician Jacob Wagner found a screw in one of the aircraft's tires during an inspection. The issue grounded the aircraft, and a replacement wheel assembly was ordered immediately. When the wrong part arrived, Thornton Aviation used its local network to locate a loaner spare wheel and tire on the field, installed it for one mission and then swapped in the replacement wheel and tire assembly when it arrived.

"They worked it out so we could borrow that wheel for one flight," Mike said. "They put that wheel on the airplane, the airplane did a mission, saved a life, came back, the replacement wheel showed up and they swapped them out. That little thing—to use your resources like they do—is priceless."



Michael Harkins, Sea Aviation



Thornton Aviation keeps Sea Aviation's Hawker 800XPs mission ready.

For Mike, who has spent more than 40 years in aviation, the difference is not only technical expertise but also the sense that Thornton Aviation treats the mission as its own. "My impression of Thornton Aviation is I'm their number one customer," he said. "I know that's not true, but that's the impression they give me."

MICHAEL HARKINS, AIRCRAFT ASSET MANAGER

"Thornton Aviation's communication is fantastic. I always know the status of the airplane, which is critical when lives are literally on the line."

The relationship is also supported by transparency and trust on the business side. Mike noted that Thornton Aviation's invoices are clear and accurate, allowing him to approve payment quickly without unnecessary back-and-forth. "Their numbers are pretty much spot on," he said. "Invoicing is very important for me. I can get them paid quicker if I don't have to go back and forth."

As the operation brings additional aircraft online, Thornton Aviation's role will continue to be centered on readiness, responsiveness and practical problem solving. The mission demands aircraft that can launch on short notice, often with only a narrow maintenance window between crew rest and the next assignment.

"Anything I can do to help them out, no problem," Mike said. "We wouldn't survive as a company without them right now."

For Thornton Aviation, the partnership reflects the company's customer-first approach in one of the most demanding aviation environments imaginable. By combining technical capability, fast communication and a willingness to go beyond routine support, Thornton Aviation helps ensure that aircraft dedicated to organ transplant transport remain ready for the missions that matter most.





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