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News

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* * * * * Medical AirLifeLine seeks
volunteer pilots for transplant
delivery.

DALLAS--Keith Lindsey is a pilot with a dream. He would like to join with other pilots around the state to help in medical emergencies by starting a Texas chapter of AirLifeLine.

AirLifeLine is a non-profit volunteer organization made up of pilots around the country to help with medical emergencies, such as delivering vital organs for transplantation and rare blood types for transfusion when there is not time or opportunity to utilize commercial airlines.

AirLifeLine was founded in Sacramento, Calif., three years ago by businessman Tom Goodwin. It occurred to Goodwin that pilots have a unique situation--they not only enjoy flying in their spare time, but they must fly in order to keep up their skills and meet licensing requirements. Why not also utilize the time spent in a very expensive hobby to help others? Thus AirLifeLine was born.

Birth does not mean growth, however. It took a plug from "Dear Abby" to really get AirLifeLine going. Abby said in her nationally syndicated column that she read about the project in a California paper and contacted Goodwin. Believing the project to be a good cause, she wrote a column on the effort, as well as printing Goodwin's "thank you" letter two months later. Not only did individual pilots respond around the country, but also donations to pay for fuel and plane rentals were sent to the organization.

And, thanks to "Dear Abby," Lindsey, who lives in Fort Worth, learned about AirLifeLine. Not only has Lindsey signed up for the organization, he has volunteered to coordinate a Texas branch.

It was a television story about the new coordinated transplant program at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas that caused Lindsey to wonder whether help was needed in the area. A call to the station got him in contact with the health science center. Learning there was a need, he began seeking out other pilots who might like to volunteer. So far nine others have said they'd like to help.

"The development of such an organization operating out of Texas could be an invaluable asset not only to the state but to the whole Southwest," says Dr. Charles R. Baxter, professor of Surgery at the health science center. Baxter is also in charge of the famous Parkland Memorial Hospital Burn Unit and is director of the UT/Lions Transplant Program in Dallas.

Lindsey is being encouraged in his dream by his wife, Marty. She had been a pre-med student before choosing to marry Keith nearly 45 years ago. At that time the pilot, whose career has always been connected with flying--whether in the old Army Air Corps, the Air Force or civilian life, was stationed at Love Field in Dallas, then an air base. At a later time he was to fly the RB-57D, sister plane to the U-2.

Always supportive of her pilot-husband, Marty Lindsey talks with pride about the antique 1946 Stinson Voyager Lindsey flies, as well as the role he is taking in organizing volunteer pilots in Texas.

"The plane's practically rebuilt, and we're just about ready to restore the inside," she said.

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The UT Health Science Center's coordinated "bankable" organ transplantation program opened only recently. "Bankable" organs are those capable of being stored for transplantation at a later time. The institution's effort brings together transplant work for skin, burn and other trauma victims, corneas and sclera (tissue from the white of the eye), joints for patients with certain bone and cartilage problems and transplantation of the iliac crest, a portion of the upper pelvic bone often used for fusions. The program's skin bank is the largest in the country.

The program already utilizes another volunteer group in its work. A network of ham radio operators helps the transplant program by coordinating national needs on a daily basis, especially for skin and corneas.

Pilots interested in a Texas AirLifeLine group may contact Lindsey at 2 Chapel Court, Fort Worth, Texas 76118, 817/498-6343.

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Photos of Lindsey and his antique plane available on request.

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