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Homedownload sts ragnarok : Archives : March 2008 : **Some careers are taking off with addition of pilot license**

## Some careers are taking off with addition of pilot license

March 04,2008 By [Kelly Cramer](#)

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For some owners, one helipad on their megayacht isn't enough.

The 303-foot M/Y *Tatoosh* has two • one on the aft of its third deck and another on the sundeck. There's also a lounge for chopper passengers and a stateroom for the pilot of the helicopter, which remains onboard.

Capt. Paul Thorsen noticed this trend a few years ago and made the decision to get his pilot's license.

"I made this career choice because I knew the market is out there," said Thorsen, a 34-year-old native of South Africa.

None of the marine training academies offer pilot training although Maritime Professional Training does offer classes on becoming a flight attendant since so many megayacht owners jet to their boats on private airplanes.

But helicopters are the new yacht baubles • some are painted to match the yacht's stripes and they may soon be standard orders on new builds and refits, even on some 120-footers.

The burgeoning trend is why the French aviation consulting firm Heli Riviera has opened up shop in the United States and enlisted retired Royal Navy pilot James Freaun to oversee

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development out of a Ft. Lauderdale office.

"We're seeing more and more with helipads on the back or the front, in some cases," Freaan said. "It's one of these markets that's growing and its something people need to start taking more interest in • especially the safety aspects."

Heli Riviera, which works with yachts on a consulting basis to design safe helipads, recruit aviation crew and pick out the right aircraft, also offers several safety classes designed for working with onboard helicopters.

Making the switch from being a crew member to a pilot is no easy task, he said.

"Really, I hear people say 'I fancy getting into that,'" Freaan said. "For this position, it needs to be your full-time job and you need to have experience in this. If somebody wants to do this and they're in the yachting industry already, leave it for a bit and build up some flight hours and then come back."

Freaan said until insurance companies or the MCA set regulations for safety in this area, no yacht- and helicopter-specific training is required. There is a proposed MCA amendment under consideration currently.

Once regulations are in place, yachting schools may begin offering aviation training and crew who have made yachting their career might find it easier to make the transition than Thorsen has.

Once Thorsen • who got his start in boating doing salvage work with a friend • made up his mind to get a pilot's license, he had to find a school. He heard an advertisement on the radio for Silver State Helicopters and looked into the Las Vegas company's background. Then he took out a \$70,000 student loan because the tuition had to be paid in full and in advance.

He earned his private pilot's license and completed hundreds more hours of training and flight time toward his commercial license, but didn't finish because the school closed the doors Feb. 3 to about 2,500 students at its more than 30 schools across the country and filed for bankruptcy protection.

According to court documents, Silver State listed debts up to \$50 million and its largest creditor is the financing company most of its students used. In a written statement, the company blamed its financial woes on the recent downturn in U.S. credit markets and said new enrollments were down.

That has left Thorsen and others stuck with a huge debt and no commercial license to show for it.

But the native South African says he will persevere.

He's looking into other schools and waiting to hear if any part of

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**Roberta Nedry**



Roberta Nedry is president of Hospitality Excellence, a Ft. Lauderdale-based firm that provides consulting and training on how to deliver exceptional service. She writes our occasional "Serve It Up" column.

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his loan will be forgiven by the lender, who he has been in contact with since Silver State's closing.

Thorsen plans, as Frean suggested, to leave private yachting for awhile to get the flight experience he needs to land a job as a pilot on a megayacht.

"Megayachts are only hiring if you have high hours • at least 1,000," he said. "It's what I want to do and I enjoy it."

*Kelly Cramer is managing editor of The Triton. Comments on this story are welcome at [kelly@the-triton.com](mailto:kelly@the-triton.com) .*

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