

# PILOTS, HOTELIERS, ON THE RUNWAY



## Richard Estenson Romancing the Past with His Hangar Hotel

Richard Estenson wanted to be a fighter pilot so badly his blood pressure went sky high. At the University of North Dakota, he completed the intensive fighter squadron training with flying colors, but he faced just one problem. His blood pressure would sky rocket at the prospect of becoming a part of the elite force, so much so that he couldn't pass the stringent physical required of all fighter hopefuls.

Even though his dream was thwarted, his goal of working in the field of aviation was certainly not. He used his electrical engineering degree to land a job with NASA in Houston. There, he joined the Ellington Air Force Base flying club and bought a B36TC Bonanza, and later, a pressurized Cessna 340 Twin.

Spontaneously, Estenson and his wife flew to Fredericksburg, Texas, they fell in love with the small town, moved there, and became entrepreneurs. Their first business was the Fredericksburg Brewing Company; the Hangar Hotel came next.

Estenson wanted people to have a memorable hotel in Fredericksburg, and he let his passion for aviation guide the way. "I decided the hotel would have a World War II/South Pacific aviation theme," he says. "It was a powerful period in our past; it provided for unique architecture and fit in well with

Fredericksburg's aviation past."

He created the Hangar Hotel next to the runways of the Gillespie County Airport, as a kind of immersion destination. You can taxi your aircraft right up to the hotel and park in their transient spaces.

The imposing, wooden structure of the hangar, an old 70-foot water tower, a vintage searchlight and transplanted palm trees create the realistic scene. Once inside the hotel, the theme becomes even more detailed. The rich smell of bomber jacket leather, smooth dark carved woods and airy rattans conjure the exclusivity of an O-Club. Hotel staff dress in period-style uniforms and in the background you hear a familiar tune... "There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover."

Between running the hotel and the brewery, he continues to find the time to do what he loves most, flying. Often it's in the 1946 North American Navion displayed on the hotel's ramp. He fully restored the airplane to fit the theme of the Hangar Hotel.

Little did Estenson expect that his very first flight was a clue to his future of promoting the past!

To experience the Hangar Hotel yourself, go to [HangarHotel.com](http://HangarHotel.com), 830.997.9990.

## Jim Dunn A Pilot's Dream

Conrad Hilton has nothing on Jim Dunn – and Jim is quick to agree. "At our hotel, we will even bring you a cup of coffee if you have a very early take off," Dunn chuckles smugly. "Conrad would never have done that!"

Dunn's hotel, the Airtel Plaza, offers the kind of service and amenities that makes it a pilot's dream. He's got the ideal location for starters. His hotel has its own ramp that runs right up to the lobby from the Van Nuys airport in Southern California; the busiest general aviation airport in the world. He plays host to a large share of the pilots who make the 500,000 take offs and landings at Van Nuys. He figures hundreds upon thousands of pilots have gotten good nights' sleep under his hotel's roof.

Dunn is a pilot, too, and that's another reason why Airtel Plaza is the perfect place for pilots to stay overnight. "There are a couple or so other hotels like ours that are basically right on the runway, but you're going to find they're not run with the enthusiasm we have here at Airtel," Dunn exclaims. "I'm a chain of one, but pilots enjoy staying here because we provide what's important to them. We've got a quiet room ready to go with no waiting. We allow extra late check-ins and we'll even bring something out of the kitchen for you if you arrive late."

The hotel was actually a catalyst for Dunn to finish his pilot training. He says he was always interested in flying, but never found time away from his land development company to pursue it. Opening the hotel in 1984 gave him the opportunity to finally follow through with becoming a pilot. "It was quite convenient for me to go to training and be consistent with it being at the airport," he says.

He bought a Piper Seminole which he flew until about ten years ago. Now he has a helicopter – a Long Ranger II. "And, we do tours right off the hotel ramp." You begin to get the feeling Dunn couldn't make a bad business decision if he tried. They will fix you up with a lunch or dinner package, or something romantic and then take you for an evening flight over the lights of Los Angeles or Malibu.

Dunn's newest venture includes adding even more to the hotel and saving an aviation landmark at the same time. "In December of last year, I was informed that Hangar One (from the movie *Casablanca*) was being demolished and because it was not on airport property, I was lucky enough to ask the owner to allow me a few weeks to relocate it. They agreed and we were able to salvage an extremely iconic piece of Van Nuys Airport and Hollywood movie-making memorabilia."

Dunn is currently resurrecting the façade and integrating it into an essential outdoor meeting space where they will show movies and have social events adjacent to their pool.

The anticipation of what's to come next is most exciting. You can reach the Airtel Plaza Hotel at [AirtelPlaza.com](http://AirtelPlaza.com), 800.366.8167.

