

VISIONARY Leadership

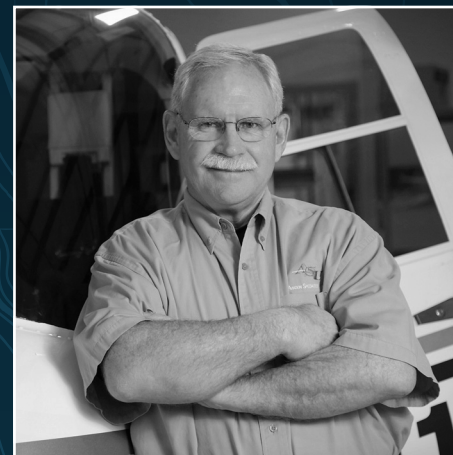
AS AVIATION SPECIALTIES UNLIMITED MOVES INTO AN EXCITING NEW STAGE IN ITS HISTORY, A HIGH LEVEL OF CONTINUITY IN ITS LEADERSHIP TEAM ENSURES THE COMPANY IS STILL FOCUSED ON CARRYING OUT ITS MISSION.

BY BEN FORREST | PHOTOS BY DAVID CLEVERDON

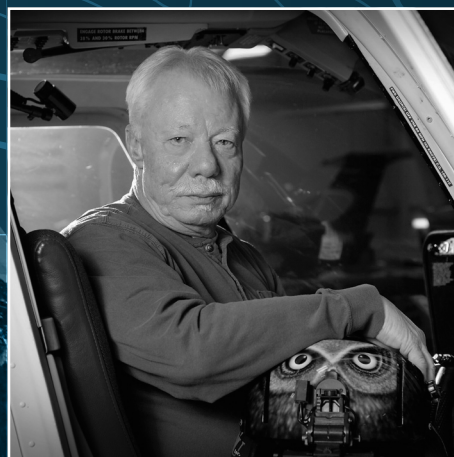


"It is our mission at ASU to continue advancing NVG technology in all aspects."

— ASU president
Jim Winkel



Kim Harris, senior business development manager



Mike Atwood, CEO



As the founder and visionary behind Aviation Specialties Unlimited (ASU) and a trailblazer in the world of night vision goggle (NVG) technology, Mike Atwood has been synonymous with the company's success.

But in his 22 years at the helm, Atwood made a deliberate effort to mentor and mold other senior managers to ensure a smooth transition when he decided to step back from the day-to-day but continue to serve as CEO of the company.

That time has arrived, and as ASU embarks on a new chapter in its history, Atwood's mentorship, along with a company-wide focus on cross-training and organic growth, is ensuring a steadfast focus on maintaining his vision.

"One of the greatest honors for me at ASU has been building relationships with customers and the team at ASU," said Atwood. "Both are like family to me and Chris, my wife and business partner. Unlike large corporations, we built ASU in a way that allowed us never to lose touch with those that matter to us. Everyone at ASU shares this same mentality. It is part of our culture. We take care of people."

"I am confident that the team at ASU that our customers already know and have great relationships with will continue to receive the best customer service in the industry."

As Atwood steps into semi-retirement, there are several familiar faces guiding ASU in senior management roles.

Jim Winkel, who joined the company as president in August of 2013, remains in that role. Kim Harris, previously director of operations, is now the company's senior business development manager.

Justin Watlington is ASU's new director of operations, and Hannah Gordon, the former director of sales and the company's current vice president of administration since 2013, will remain in that role.

Kip McDermott, a former maintenance director and executive director of business development, is

now vice president of engineering.

"Here at ASU it's ingrained in our culture to commit to the long-haul with our customers, partners, and our team members. The dedication to longevity isn't just months or years, it spans decades," said Gordon. "The rise of talented leaders in our company and seamless succession are testaments to this commitment."

This high level of continuity ensures ASU remains focused on carrying out the same mission it has always had: To protect those who serve, protect, rescue and defend.

"We're certainly not going to abandon our core business," said Harris, who joined the company in 2004 and is also a former instructor pilot and chief pilot.

"We're very strong, and the market is still growing. We're very satisfied with that. But Mike recognized many years ago ... that we need to diversify the company and spread out and not put all of our eggs in one basket and try and tap new markets."

"And that's what Jim brings to the table, is the knowledge, if you will, and the depth of level of knowledge within a broader industry to do that ... so this has been a transition that's been occurring for the last two years or so, and I would use the term graceful. It's a very nice transition."

ASU was founded in 1995 with the goal of bringing military technology to civil flying, in order to improve the safety and capabilities of first responders, law enforcement agencies and emergency medical services (EMS) workers.

Today, the company is a leader in night vision technology, distributing night vision products produced by lead manufacturers; fabricating and installing cockpit lighting systems; servicing and maintaining systems for clientele; and delivering in-house night vision goggle training and pilot instruction.

"ASU has the most extensive list of STCs [supplemental type certificates] for night vision systems in the world," said McDermott. "I will

continue to help customers obtain new STCs, and make sure their fleet of aircraft are compliant."

"My interaction with clients on multiple levels, and experience, gives me the unique ability to aid them in navigating through the rigors of compliance across the globe."

ASU also has a history of helping pioneer new programs, bringing the first NVG programs to New Zealand and the first training programs to Australia and Ireland, said Harris. The company is on course to do the first NVG startups in a number of other countries, he said.

Ultimately, ASU has helped bring NVG technology from a luxury some civil operators enjoyed to a widely-used commodity that makes night operations safer around the world.

"Everybody looks at goggles the same way as they're beginning to look at iPads and electronic flight bags—as just another tool in their bag of tricks to make their operations safer and more efficient," said Harris.

With ASU in the capable hands of its employees and management team, Atwood is looking forward to spending more time at his home in the Idaho mountains, spending quality time with family and enjoying hobbies outside of aviation, like working on classic cars.

He'll still be involved with the company, never more than a phone call away. And very little will change, thanks to the leadership team's commitment to remain true to his vision.

"They can expect the same great customer service and responsiveness and a level of commitment and partnership with our customers," said Harris.

"We pride ourselves in being able to work and partner with the customers to provide the products that give them a level of safety that they want and need—not necessarily something that we just want to sell."

"So I don't think anybody's going to see any significant difference, except that we're going to get larger and better and faster." ✈



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