

# Guidance Aviation, Inc. — Prescott, AZ

**Master Award Winner** John Stonecipher is a master at developing new markets and his vision for **Guidance Aviation** is helping his company soar to ever higher levels of success.

Guidance Aviation provides helicopter flight training and ground school instruction from a modern facility in Prescott (elevation 5,045 ft.). The company was founded in 1998 and it is one of only two FAA-approved high altitude helicopter training facilities in the country.

The core of the Guidance Aviation program is 'flight cost reduction training', which enables Guidance to train better pilots with less actual flying time and with a twenty-five percent reduction in cost to students. This is accomplished through the use of Redbird FMX flight simulators — state-of-the-art training devices which offer 160 degrees of wraparound visuals and have fully-enclosed cockpits that allow students and their instructors to fly real-world scenarios.

"Learning how to fly a helicopter is very expensive and the teaching model has always been about getting into the helicopter to teach," explained Stonecipher, who has been training pilots for 20 years.

"I believe that learning happens outside of the cockpit," he added. "It's like juggling and riding a unicycle at the same time. You have to learn how to juggle first."

"I always believed in a more efficient process," he said. "I had to start my own company in order to realize the vision that I started with two decades ago."

That vision included reducing the cost of training to make it more affordable for more students. Guidance secured Sallie Mae student aid financing in 1999. The company also began working with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Prescott campus in 2003 to offer one of the most comprehensive helicopter academic programs in the nation.

The game-changer was when Guidance partnered with Yavapai College in 2006 to offer the ground school portion of its training as a fully-accredited program for Yavapai students. In 2009, the college created an Associate of Applied Science Professional Helicopter Pilot degree and chose Guidance to provide ground and flight training. When the program debuted in 2010, Yavapai College became the only collegiate helicopter flight training program in the state.



John L. Stonecipher,  
President/CEO  
Guidance Aviation, Inc.

"Guidance is a career school," Stonecipher said. "Our goal is to have every student graduate ready to be a helicopter pilot. We have not done our job unless our students are successfully placed in the industry."

The company now also offers fixed-wing flight and ground training, including jet aircraft training.

Stonecipher realized the importance of seeking professional advice when he was starting his business and he sought out the services of the **Yavapai College SBDC**.

"The SBDC helped us with financial projections, with revenue forecasting and with understanding capital expenditures," Stonecipher said. "I don't have an accounting background and the SBDC has a great guy

in (Business Analyst) **Fred Kennedy**. He treated my business like it was his own business and he has helped us overcome a number of hurdles over the years."

"The SBDC is a wonderful resource and it's the people there that make it work. They've done a lot to help us create jobs for our community."

Guidance realized an increase in revenues of nearly fifty percent from 2009 to 2010. The company is now approaching 30 employees. Stonecipher anticipates continued growth due to expected benefits from the Post 9-11 GI Bill, which provides funding for tuition, flight fees and a living allowance for Veterans who attend college, and the debut of Yavapai College's two-year degree program.

"Millions of Federal dollars will be coming into the state of Arizona," he noted. "Guidance is leading the way with new and innovative approaches to generating business, jobs and tax revenues — all while proudly serving our U.S. Military Veterans who need career training to enter the civilian job market."

Stonecipher advises new business owners to 'stop trying to do it all'.

"The biggest challenge in business is finding the right people and letting them do their job without micro-managing them," he added. "If you have to micro-manage people, then you need to either look at the people you're hiring, or look at yourself in the mirror."



## FAST FACTS

### Guidance Aviation, Inc.

Type of Business:  
Flight School

Owner:  
John Stonecipher

Address:  
6565 Crystal Lane,  
Prescott, AZ 86301

Phone:  
(928) 443-9370

Website:  
[www.guidance.aero](http://www.guidance.aero)

Business Began: 1998

Employees at Startup: 1

Employees in 2009/2010:  
22/27

First Year Revenue: \$200,000

Revenue in 2009/2010:  
\$2.4/\$3.5 million

Startup Capital: \$180,000  
Source of Initial Capital: Owner  
Investment, Private Party Loan

SBDC Counselor:  
Fred Kennedy  
Yavapai College SBDC  
(928) 776-2008

