

People

In The News

Beitler merges passion for medicine with flying

By Urvaksh Karkaria

STAFF WRITER

Most kids dream of growing up to be a doctor or a pilot. Jonathan Beitler managed to turn both dreams into reality.

Beitler is a radiation oncologist at **Emory University's** Winship Cancer Institute. He is also a pilot with a cause.

The 53-year-old has merged his passion for medicine and flying with altruism.

Beitler is a member of the Angel Flight network — a national nonprofit that relies on private pilots to ferry economically disadvantaged people in remote locations to centers of medical care.

The volunteer pilots, like Beitler, donate their time and aircraft.

Beitler recently flew a 35-year-old woman with spinal stenosis from Charleston, S.C., to Atlanta for corrective surgery at Emory Midtown. He plans to do one Angel Flight a month.

Beitler's fixed-wing aircraft is often his vehicle home.

Beitler, who works and lives in Atlanta five days a week, commutes on weekends to his wife, Mary Katherine Hayes, and three kids in New Canaan, Conn.

As a kid, Beitler had a list of to-dos in his life — and he's managed to check off all three.



EXECUTIVE PROFILE
JONATHAN BEITLER

Current job: Radiation oncologist, Emory University's Winship Cancer Institute

Former job: Radiation oncologist, Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Age: 53 **Born:** Manhattan, N.Y.

Education: Bachelor's degree, Lehigh University; medical degree, Medical College of Pennsylvania; MBA, Columbia University; residency, Memorial Sloan-Kettering

Family: Wife, Mary Katherine Hayes; children: two daughters and one son

BYRON E. SMALL

"I wanted to learn how to fly. I wanted to get an MBA. I wanted to get an MD," he said.

Beitler honed his flying skills on the cheap while serving in the U.S. Army Reserve.

The army, which trains pilots and flight controllers, had a bunch of UH-1 helicopter simulators.

"That helicopter flies very much like my plane at the time," Beitler said.

The army had stopped training pilots for these helicopters, but needed to train flight controllers on the simulators.

Beitler helped train them on these million-dollar machines, in exchange for practice times.

Piloting aircraft fulfills Beitler's need to be in control.

"Flying is peaceful and a skill that you build on," he said. "It gives you a sense of control."

Like medicine, it also demands a keen sense of organization.

"We have a checklist [of things to do] before we go flying. Even though you've flown all the time and done this a hundred times before, you go through the checklist," Beitler said. "Medicine has really adopted some of those principles in terms of quality of control."

Beitler seldom flies "for pleasure" and is hands-on in the cockpit.

"Some people use autopilot, which cuts down on your workload," he said. "I don't even have an autopilot, so I'm constantly hand-flying. I like to train and keep my skills up by doing that."

Beitler flies about 10 hours a month during flying season — March through December — often to meetings and lectures. He spends at least \$20,000



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Hands-on: Similar to the quality control principles of medicine, there is a checklist of things to do before flying no matter how many times a pilot has flown, Beitler says.

annually on flying and is on his second plane.

Flying, however, isn't a hobby Beitler can share with his wife of more than 20 years.

"My wife is a terrible flier," he said. "She can't stand flying on a 747. She is the first one to panic on the entire plane if there is a bump."

When Hayes was asked if what she thinks about Beitler's piloting, she responded: "If he told me he wanted to sell his plane tomorrow, I would be very happy."

When not helping diagnose cancerous tumors or flying about the country,

Beitler putters around with wood in his basement.

Furniture-making provides a permanent "reminder of something that you've created," said Beitler, who has crafted a bunk bed, cradle and bookcases.

Like with flying and medicine, furniture making is precise, and requires organization and attention to detail.

Beitler took up furniture-making as a father-son hobby with his dad, who at 83 still runs a company.

"He rarely gives me time to work with him," Beitler said of his dad. "I'm hoping that when he retires, that he spends a little more time doing that."

"Flying is peaceful and a skill that you build on."

Jonathan Beitler

Emory University's Winship Cancer Institute

The flying and furniture-making are good outlets, said Hayes, also a radiation oncologist.

"What we do is really hard," she said. "When you have outlets, it allows you to sort of focus better and channel things better."

So how does Beitler make time for his multiple hobbies? "I'll tell you a secret," he said. "I do not have a TV."

Television is a time sap, Beitler said.

"I think it can't make you dumber," he said, "but it seems to."

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If you know an executive whose hobby — or day job — is unusual enough to be in print, contact Misty Williams at mistywilliams@bizjournals.com.

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