

air Shows

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PERIODICAL

Marketing Trends

When Bad Things Happen

Adapt or Die

short *Final*

Stallion 51 celebrates 25 years

They say, “Do what you love,” and if there is one person who’s taken that idiom to heart, it’s Lee Lauderback. He took some-

thing on every pilot’s bucket list and turned it into a thriving business.



“Every day, I think to myself, ‘What would you like to do tomorrow?’ I say, ‘I’d like to fly the Mustang,’” said Lauderback. “I’ve been blessed to do it almost every day for 25 years.”

In 2012, the company he founded and promoted by flying at air shows nationwide is celebrating its silver anniversary.

“For an aviation company to be in business 25 years—there’s not a lot of companies that can say that,” said Stallion 51 General Manager Angela West, who runs the company’s 50,000 square feet of offices and hangars at Kissimmee Gateway Airport in Florida. The company boasts a fleet of dual-control Mustangs, as well as a T-6 and L-39. “We created a Mecca here,” said West.

“Personally, I like to think I have made a difference in safety for this kind of aircraft,” said Lauderback, who hoped to curb the Mustang’s once-staggering annual crash rates by training pilots to fly to a professional standard. “We wanted to keep the Mustang flying and in front of the people.”

It is a goal shared by Lauderback and West and why they teamed up to showcase the iconic plane at the Gathering of Mustangs and Legends in 2007.

“The Mustang as a whole is such a draw and it draws worldwide,” said West. “We wanted to create an event that would go down in history and I think we accomplished that. Five years later, people are still talking about it.”

“It was a very special time,” said Lauderback, who says nothing compares to the flying he’s been able to do in front of crowds as one of the early members of the Air Force Heritage Flight program. “To go fly a P-51 on a Sunday afternoon when nobody’s shooting at you – it’s giving back a little bit. It certainly isn’t a right; it’s a privilege.”