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Wylie Community Welcomes High-Flying Doctor

By Jared Johnson

As Michael Bennington, M.D., will attest, flight plans are often adjusted while planes are still in the air. In his case, a love for flying planes was significant in changing his career from corporate chemist to family practice physician, which is no small move. Dr. Bennington is the medical director of First Aid Family Care, Wylie's new urgent care clinic located on the southeast corner of Highway 78 and FM 544. It hasn't exactly been a nonstop trip, however.

Taking Off

Bennington was born in Alice, Texas and grew up in New Braunfels. He graduated from Southwest Texas State University in 1978 with a Bachelor's Degree in chemistry. Within a year he moved to Dallas to work as a polymer chemist for Texas Instruments. It was while working there that he took his first flying lesson. TI hosts a number of activity clubs for employees, and one day Bennington saw a poster for the flying club that offered a free first flying lesson. He tried it out and immediately "fell in love with flying."

It didn't take long for piloting to become more than a hobby. Bennington soon started taking lessons every weekend. He quickly racked up a gamut of flying licenses progressing from student license to private, instrument rating, single-engine commercial, multi-engine commercial and flying instructor. Once certified as an instructor, he began teaching regular lessons. One of his flight students, a surgical equipment salesman, offered to trade him an opportunity in the medical sales field in return for free flying lessons. Bennington took him up on the offer and soon found himself with a brand new career path.

Cruising at Comfortable Altitude

For the next ten years, Bennington had a successful career in medical sales. The company even gave him the perk of flying his own plane across his five-state territory. He spoke with lots of doctors and learned much of their work as part of his sales calls. He watched a number of surgical procedures, which fascinated him. It was during this time that he first considered going to medical school. The more he became familiar with hospital surroundings, the more he liked them.

In a bold yet calculated move, Bennington decided to resign from his position, withdraw from his savings account and apply for medical school. He started by taking pre-med courses at night and doing flight instruction on weekends to help pay his bills. He was accepted to Texas Tech University School of Medicine in Lubbock in 1996. The rigors of his coursework caused him to scale back in his flying, but he still found ways to keep up his love for the air. For instance, in his third year of medical school – often described as the most difficult year – a fellow med student learned that Bennington had a flight instructor's license and convinced him to offer personal flying lessons.

Preparing for Landing

Dr. Bennington graduated from medical school in 2000 and completed his residency in family practice in Anniston, Ala. in 2005. He was named the medical director of First Aid Family Care shortly thereafter. Once he became a doctor, he knew he wouldn't be able to be a flight instructor anymore. So after amassing nearly 3,000 hours of flight time and being checked out to pilot 34 different kinds of aircraft, Dr. Bennington now spends his time serving the Wylie community.

“As a Texas native, I am pleased to be returning to help meet the health care needs of the community as they raise the next generation of Texans,” he said.

Dr. Bennington is an avid bird hunter. He also enjoys golfing, SCUBA diving, motorcycling, driving exotic cars and traveling.

First Aid Family Care is the first clinic of its kind in the area. It provides convenient treatment for minor emergencies in the evenings and on Saturdays, when regular doctors' offices are closed. Services include treatment for a variety of minor illnesses and injuries such as sprains, viruses, cuts and bruises, as well as vaccinations, lab/blood work and x-rays.

On behalf of Wylie and its surrounding communities, the First Aid Family Care staff welcomes Dr. Bennington to the area! We're glad your flight plan led you here!

Jared Johnson is the PR Coordinator for Richardson Regional Medical Center.