



NATA's "FBOs: Above and Beyond" initiative highlights the extraordinary services provided by our Fixed Base Operator (FBO) members. The association's goal is to provide a well-rounded perspective on the FBO industry, directly from those with first-hand experience.

Monadnock Aviation Recognized as U.S. Small Business Administration's 2018 N.H. Veteran-Owned Small Business of the Year



Chasing submarines in a P-3 Orion, helicoptering into the DMZ, and hunting and retrieving a fugitive in Venezuela. ... This may sound like a movie montage, but it's just a handful of memories from Elizabeth Bendel's wide-ranging career as a Naval officer, federal agent and aviation services provider. (Although if there ever is a movie, the 10-year Navy veteran and mother of two hopes she'll be played by Julia Roberts.)

These days, Bendel, 50, of Keene, can be found at Monadnock Aviation, her flight school and aviation business, surrounded in her office by pictures of airplanes and places she's visited.

"I guess you reinvent yourself at different times depending on what your life calls for at that time," Bendel reflects.

When she founded Monadnock Aviation in 2008 with her then-husband, there were only three employees. Now, with 10 employees, the company is blossoming, she says.

In fact, the business has been recognized as the U.S. Small Business Administration's 2018 N.H. Veteran Owned Small Business of the Year.

The company's employees provide all the aviation services for the Keene-owned Dillant-Hopkins Airport in North Swanzey. That means aircraft management, maintenance, inspection, storage and fuel, as well as flight instruction.

"You can imagine the number of things you would need as you fly into an airport you're not familiar with. That's what my staff provides," explains Bendel, the company's sole owner. "I think of us as the



unofficial welcome center of Keene, of the Monadnock Region, because every jet and corporate aircraft and small plane who comes through Keene comes through my staff.”

It’s this staff, she says, that sets her business apart.

“I cannot say enough about the people who make up Monadnock Aviation. I received the award, so my picture is out, and people are congratulating me, and that’s fantastic,” Bendel says. “But the truth is, nobody does anything amazing on their own. And I didn’t do this on my own. I have phenomenal people who work here.”

Half of those employees served in the armed forces. Bendel says she feels a particularly strong connection when talking with other veterans.

“Especially veterans who have served in arduous duty or combat zones. You just get it. You just know where the other has been, no matter what the background is, and it works.”

Regardless of what issues arise during the day, the team comes together to figure it out, according to Bendel.

“We just take care of the aircraft and get them in and get them out, and people don’t even know it’s happening right here in Keene,” she says.

Dillant-Hopkins Airport is used daily by private pilots, businesses and corporate jets.

The relationship between the airport and local companies is established, Bendel says, but there’s still room for growth. The next step is getting the message out to educate businesses and show them how the airport can be used for the community, she believes.

This focus on community is what sets Bendel apart for Fred Royal, professor of law at Western New England University School of Law in Springfield, Mass., who first met Bendel when he was learning to fly at Dillant-Hopkins.

“Most business people don’t talk about the greater social responsibility — maybe they add that on, but that was her first comment,” he says. “That’s why I find her special and unique, because of the way she views her role of the business at the airport as this asset of the community, and she’s working to help develop it.”

This means reaching out not only to businesses, but also to high school students who might grow up to be pilots.

Royal believes this sense of duty may have come from Bendel’s military service, but adds that she’s too modest.



"I mean that in a very positive way because I think she has all these strengths and attributes that should be touted and brought to light" — especially, he notes, because of her success as a woman in a male-dominated field.

When asked her thoughts on succeeding in three male-dominated careers — as a Naval intelligence officer, federal agent and owner of an aviation service provider — Bendel says it isn't something she thinks about much.

"I don't mind as long as they can keep up with me!"

Read more about Monadnock Aviation's background [here](#). - Elizabeth Bendel, Monadnock Aviation

Read other stories and share your FBO experience(s) at www.nata.aero/aboveandbeyond.