

Spotlight Shines on ... Julie Ann Floyd, Key West Seaplanes



Each month, the Chamber of Commerce spotlights a business or professional person whose business card is drawn at the Business After Hours. This month's winner is Julie Ann Floyd, Key West Seaplanes.

For years, the word "seaplane" in Key West was synonymous with the Dry Tortugas, but the owners of Key West Seaplanes are changing that perception – one flight at a time.

With the Florida Keys comprising more water than high-flying dream, and Julie and her bird's eye view – with

land, the region is a seaplane pilot's Ann Floyd wants to share that dream – everyone who climbs aboard.

She co-owns Key West Seaplanes with fellow pilot Nikali Pontecorvo, and the two of them have 30 combined years of flight time and Key West residency between them. The pair started the Key West Seaplanes business nearly three years ago after working as pilots for other companies.

"But this company has been a dream of ours since we met 10 years ago," said Julie, who first took the controls in a cockpit in upstate New York, but completed the bulk of her training here in the Florida Keys.

"We've been flying down here for so long that if Nikali is flying, and I'm in the back of the plane, I can look down and know where we are just by the pattern of the water," she said. "Now, we're just trying to get people to realize that there's not just one destination for a seaplane in Key West. The Tortugas are just the tip of the iceberg. This area is a seaplane pilot's dream."

And Julie and Nikali want others to experience the thrill they get each time they take off.

Key West Seaplanes offers day trips to luxurious Little Palm Island for romantic lunches and brunches, but the pilots also know of numerous private islands that provide the perfect setting for snorkeling and a picnic lunch on an empty beach. They offer low-altitude, aerial lighthouse tours of the Keys as well as day trips to Bimini, Abaco and other Bahamian islands.

"People need to see the Keys the way we see them every day," Julie said. "I fly every day and they just never lose their beauty. We feel so

connected to the Keys, and we want to engage other people in their beauty so they understand our environment and want to protect it."

That beauty looks close enough to touch when flying at low altitudes over clear waters that reveal the distinctive silhouettes of sea turtles, spotted eagle rays, dolphins and countless other marine species that slice through the blue-green waters below.

Some people also use Key West Seaplanes as convenient transportation from Miami or Naples, as the planes are amphibious and can land on a runway at Miami International, a soft grass air strip in the islands or on the water around Abaco.

The company has also done deliveries of important documents when they absolutely had to be in Naples that afternoon, and overnight shipping was not an option.

"Other people have gone to Naples for a day of shopping, or gone island hopping just in the Keys, with stops at Cheeca Lodge, Little Palm and wherever they want," said Julie.

A 30-minute sightseeing tour on their traditional, wheeled plane starts at \$250 for up to three people.

"So for about \$100 a person, you can see the Keys the way we think they were meant to be seen," she said.

Other prices vary based on passengers, distances and length of stay, but Julie and Nikali are flexible and willing to work out various itineraries to meet the passengers' needs. The skilled pilots are equally skilled tour guides and will suggest a variety of endless possibilities for adventure, romance, shopping or simple sightseeing. Just sit back and watch the Keys pass beneath your wings.

For more information about Key West Seaplanes, call 305-294-4014 or visit www.keywestseaplanes.com.

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