

TALKING WITH ...

Frank Arenas

Arenas owns FreeFlight Airport in Coleman and is building additional airplane hangars to accommodate the need in Central Florida.



By **PATRICIA STEELE**
Daily Sun Senior Writer

COLEMAN

Frank Arenas moved to Sumter County in 1995 and bought a small airport in Coleman. His goal was to have a professional skydiving school.

"I used to do about 800 jumps a year, and now I do about 20 a year just for fun," Arenas said. "We closed the school in 1999, and I decided to go to law school. The airport was open, but we closed the school."

Arenas explained he is very goal-oriented. He had a plan when he purchased the airfield, and he had a plan when he went to law school. Now it's time for the next phase of Arenas' plans.

The Daily Sun recently spoke with Arenas about his love of flying and his future plans for the airport.

What improvements have you made in the past few years to the airstrip?

When I started, I had 15 acres of land with a 2,800-foot airstrip. The airport was built in the 1960s by Robert Little, who had operated it since then. I bought the strip from Mr. Little in 1995. He wanted

and landing much safer.

What is your next project?

I'm working with a company, Sabal Aviation out of Melbourne, to build hangars at the airport. There is such a need in Central Florida. Airports in the area have waiting lists to get a hangar, and with any additional growth, there's always someone who likes to fly or has a plane and no place to store it.

How will your project be different from others in the area?

In most small airports, you build a hangar, you lease it and at the end of the lease, the airport gets to keep the hangar. With these, you buy the hangar and the land. It's like owning a condo. You can sell it, pass it down to your kids — it's yours. We call them toy boxes, because it's more than a place to store a plane. It's good for an RV, antique cars — basically, you store your toys here.

How many hangars will you build?

We're starting with 16 in the first phase and then adding 20 more in the second phase.

Why build the hangars now?

I've had the airport for 22 years, and it's gone through a number of changes, but they were all part of my original goal. It's taken me nine years to get the permits and get everything in place to expand the airport, so this wasn't a sudden decision. I think of it as a means to improve my cash flow during retirement.

Do you have a flight instructor here at FreeFlight Airport?

Yes, people can learn to fly or renew their license through the Village Flyers Inc. This is

primarily a group of Villagers who come to FreeFlight. Many have a pilot license for small planes, or they flew in the military or flew commercial jets. But there are instructors for the Light Sport licensing.

Why do you think people are drawn to flying, especially in small planes?

In a small plane, flying is like magic. In one of the commercial planes, they're so big, it's like flying in your living room. In a small plane, you're part of the sky. And the view, especially in Central Florida, is great. There's a sense of freedom up in the sky, and the visuals are amazing.

Plus, if you want to have breakfast on the East Coast

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FREEFLIGHT AIRPORT

For more information about FreeFlight Airport, call 352-748-6629 or visit freeflightairport.com.

of Florida in the morning and lunch on the West Coast, you can make it happen. There are small airports and restaurants throughout the state.

Patricia Steele is a senior writer with The Villages Daily Sun. She can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 9029, or patricia.steele@thevillagesmedia.com.