

THE VOICE OF THE AIRPARK BUSINESS COMMUNITY FOR 30 YEARS

SCOTTSDALE Airpark News

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ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

AIRPARK REAL ESTATE PREPARES FOR STEADY CLIMB



Eric & Don Schaefer,
Schaefer & Associates



Fox & Fin's FBO Sales

Flash Driven Workouts

WHO'S WHO:

Airpark Commercial Real Estate Directory



Eric Schaefer and his dad, Don Schaefer, visit the family's Cessna 172-S. Eric flew his first solo in a glider plane when he was 15, an event his dad vividly recalls. "I looked up there and said, oh my god, that's my only son," says Don, who earned his own pilot's license just a few years ago.

FATHER-SON DUO LAND TOGETHER SOAR IN PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Story by Kimberly Hundley, Photos by Chad Koerber

The first time Eric Schaefer worked with his dad, he was 11 years old and cleaning grimy Phoenix apartments without air conditioning during the monsoon season. "Not the best summer of my life," Eric says dryly, crossing his arms.

Don Schaefer allows himself a little smile. The father-son team who head up Schaefer & Associates in the Scottsdale Airpark always had an enviable relationship, but neither one dreamed they'd end up as partners in Don's commercial real estate firm.

Right out of college, Eric rocketed to dot-com success as a marketing guy at the height of the tech boom. By all appearances he was living the Silicone Valley dream. He was young-reveling in the money and glamorous San Francisco parties. But working 10-hour days, sleeping at the office and dealing with an unpredictable CEO took their toll. "I just walked in one day and said 'I quit,'" he says. "I called dad from my car on the way home."

"What took you so long?" Don had replied, and in 2002, Schaefer & Associates became a family company. Eric likes to say he learned the business literally from the ground up working for his dad, who had a stellar reputation in the Airpark as a fair and honest man—important qualities in the management and leasing of commercial property.

Although the harsh real estate market has taken a toll on profits, the Schaefers have continued to prosper. The only vacancy rates they're concerned about are those in the properties they're managing, and Eric is quite sure his clients enjoy a higher occupancy than the industry average.

"We could probably make more money if we did things differently, but in this business, you represent the clients' best interest," Eric says. "We have always tried to treat people the way we want to be treated."

The Schaefers are in it for the long haul. They aim to build relationships. If a certain property would mean a higher yield

for the firm but wouldn't be the best fit for a client, they'll keep looking—while another agent might not, Eric says. In many instances, businesses that worked with Don on finding a space 10 or 15 years earlier will return for Schaefer & Associates' expertise when it's time to expand or downsize.

The firm, which has a staff of six, consciously made the decision to stay small, and that's proved key to staying viable in a treacherous economy. "We can do a lease in a day," Don says, underscoring the firm's ability to be ultra-responsive, hands-on, flexible and keep overhead low. The Schaefer's commitment to responsiveness has proved an invaluable business practice since day one.

"Something as basic as answering the phone and returning phone calls is such a rarity in this business. I can't even tell you how many relationships we've formed because we are the ones that answer the phones," Eric says. "We don't always tell our clients what they want to hear, but they have respect for us because we respond and get it right most of time."

The Schaefer's prefer to focus on small and medium-size businesses, a good match for the Airpark demographic as well as personally gratifying for the father and son—they say small business owners truly care and appreciate their work.

Schaefer and Associates is also a brokerage, representing buyers and sellers, but property management is the focus, and that came about organically. Investment clients would ask the firm to also take on managing the property, which inevitably means dealing with vacancies. "We found out we could lease a space better than a leasing agency because we knew all about the building, the costs," Don says. "Sometimes we'll just manage, but I think we can be most effective when we both manage and lease."

Taking calls in the middle of the night about a property crises may not seem like fascinating work compared to, say, buying TV ads for the Super Bowl—an actual part of Eric's former marketing life—but the youngest Schaefer doesn't miss his old career one iota. "I felt ultimately like I was creating nothing. Now I feel like I have relationships with clients and tenants, and it's infinitely more rewarding than to make an ad," he says. "At the end of the day, there's something very real and tangible about what I do, and it's very satisfying."

Don agrees, and he sees a new way to help clients in need while augmenting Schaefer & Associates' services. "We've been asked recently to assist several tenants in lease negotiations, and we see tenant representation as a new opportunity area. The small and mid-size businesses prevalent in the Airpark are not able to have a 'real estate expert' on their staff. We want to function in that capacity," says Don.

Not every father and son could work together on a daily basis, but Eric and Don say they appreciate one another's generational perspectives and believe



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the dynamic enriches the business. They also enjoy one another's company. The day Eric, a self-confessed speed junkie, got his pilot's license, his father was his very first passenger. As they soared over Saguaro Lake, Don caught the bug and soon took lessons at Sawyer Aviation. The two bought a Cessna 172-S together, which they keep at Scottsdale Airport. After Eric had kids—his family lives down the road from the Airpark—he took a pledge to forgo his favorite hobby for the foreseeable future, but he and his father still share their passion for flight.

"My dad and I have a really unique relationship," Eric says. "Work aside, we're really close friends. Occasionally we'll have a heated argument about work, but when work is over we can still have dinner together. Dad brings so much experience to the table, so much wisdom."

Don allows himself another smile. ■