

Private flights continue their appeal

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Even in a tough economy, corporate executives still have to travel to business destinations. With airline cutbacks and security hassles, many are skipping commercial flights and choosing corporate jets and charter flights.

For instance, Mine Safety Appliances needed to fly a half-dozen key employees, including its then-new North America president, to its helmet-making plant in upstate Vermont in February. So, they chartered a private jet out of Butler County Airport.

"The alternative would have been to fly from Pittsburgh International to Burlington, Vt., and then drive 2 1/2 hours to Newport," said Mark Deasy, spokesman for the O'Hara company. "We'd have lost more than a full day because it's five hours of drive time round-trip, and that isn't practical or cost-efficient."

Corporate Air, West Mifflin, maintains about 20 jets that fly corporate executives, movie stars and other wealthy folks from Allegheny County Airport to thousands of airports, large and small. Its top destination is New York, then places such as Florida and Las Vegas, and even Beijing for the summer Olympics.

"But the backbone of our business is corporate business," said Mike Vargo, director of sales and marketing. **Through August, its planes logged 30 percent more flights hours than the year earlier,** largely because of an increase in overseas flights.

"Does it cost more than commercial? You bet," said Vargo of the \$2,000 to \$7,500 per flight-hour tab. "But it's worth it if it means closing a multimillion-dollar deal."