



### Have You Met Kevin Russo?

The machine known as the "pilot maker" during World War II turned Kevin Russo into an air show pilot.

The New Jersey-based performer flies the venerable North American SNJ-6, more commonly known as the T-6 Texan, at air shows nationwide as a tribute to the pilots that learned to fly it before serving in combat.

"Basically all the maneuvers that I do are right out of the Navy training guides," said Russo. "The crowd is getting history while they're watching an air show. It's almost more of a ballet of aerobatics."

In the mid-1990s, Russo, then an Air Force reservist and airline pilot, became interested in air shows and began looking to buy a performance mount. He found one in the SNJ after being turned on to the plane by Dan Dameo and the pilots of the famed Six of Diamonds formation aerobatic team.

"I actually started going to their air shows and began flying with them," said Russo. "It kept on progressing to the point I'm at now."

Although his day job as a contract pilot flying Gulfstream IVs keeps him busy, Russo still finds time to fly about ten shows a season.

He's even made it into a family affair; his eight-year-old daughter Spenser frequently joins him at air shows. "She's my crew chief," said Russo, but added that Spenser isn't about to take up aerobatics just yet. "I think she's more interested in being a teacher or vet. She just loves the shows."

### Rudy Malnati Shows His Hand: Four of a Kind

Rudy Malnati knows air shows. In fact, he knows four of them intimately. He's the producer and director of the Chicago Air & Water Show, Rockford AirFest, the Milwaukee Air & Water Show, and the Gary Air Show.

"I've probably been doing this longer than anybody in the business," said Malnati. He's been involved in air shows since he was seven years old when he attended the Chicago show, then held at Lake Shore Park, as a day camp function.

So how does he put on four shows each year? Malnati chalks up his success to his staff of experts. "They've been with me for over twenty years," said Malnati, adding that many are retired from the FAA, are former park employees, or are air traffic controllers.

Malnati says that many shows don't rival Chicago's complexity and magnitude. "They don't have the airspace involved," he said. That's why Malnati's controllers work in close coordination with Chicago TRACON to keep operations in their busy airspace humming.

Even as Malnati manages the myriad details associated with his suite of shows, he keeps one eye on the larger picture of air shows nationwide. "Our industry needs to stay together during these trying times. Hopefully our industry will continue to stay strong and grow."



Russo and daughter Spenser on the wing of their T-6 Texan.