

Raider Highlight

Archbishop Rummel High School



Luis Mora, '00, achieves 'dream job' as pilot of Hornets' owner jet

Knowing that his ultimate “dream job” was within reach, the young pilot met his future boss moments before the 27-year-old pilot flew the seven-seat, \$6 million Cessna Citation jet for the first time.

The future boss and jet’s owner had a simple question for the pilot: “Nice to meet you Luis, now can you land this thing?”

The confident pilot replied, “Yes, Mr. Shinn, I sure can. No problem.” And he did just that, as he made a perfect landing in New Jersey the first time he flew the jet.

The young pilot is Archbishop Rummel alumnus Luis Mora, '00, and the plane’s owner and Mora’s new boss following that initial flight is George Shinn, owner of the New Orleans Hornets basketball team.

Mora states that flying as a corporate jet pilot is the ultimate post for an airline pilot, and he acknowledges that he has worked his way up the ladder with many hours of flying in his career. The young pilot said that his current position is a goal he had back in his youth because all his life he knew that he would someday be a professional pilot.

“My dad flew as a hobby and I’d fly with him, so I always had an interest in flying. When it came time to go to college, I knew that aviation was my main interest and that would be my major study,” he explained.

Before he began his college career, the Archbishop Rummel student shadowed his dad when flying, usually in the back of his small plane. During high school he took just three hours of professional training at Lakefront Airport.

“Initially, I didn’t do too much of anything in high school, but then I really got involved in Campus Ministry and Operation HeadStart because I liked helping people,” he said. “I was really close to my religion and wanted to help others and these two groups gave me that opportunity.”

Mora said he has fond memories of former mathematics teacher Arthur Richard. “Since day one at Rummel, I had Mr. Richard for an enrichment class the summer before I started Rummel. He made me feel at home and always treated me with respect. We clicked from the very beginning and have a great friendship to this day.”

When he was flying in Colorado, Mora and his former teacher would exchange emails on a regular basis, he remembers.

In May, 2000, Mora received his Archbishop Rummel diploma and headed to Ruston to study professional aviation at Louisiana Tech University. Fellow 2000 alumnus Seth Simpson also headed to Ruston to study curriculum and is today a pilot for the US Air Force.

“Most of my time at Tech involved aviation, and I was a member of an aviation fraternity and played some intramural sports. I also worked part time at the local airport,” he said.

Mora received a bachelor’s degree in professional aviation, with a minor in aviation management, in May, 2004. He had a commercial pilot license with instrument reading, so he could fly at night or in inclement weather.

Upon graduation he moved back home and commuted daily to Baton Rouge to do traffic reports for WJBO 1150 Radio in the state capital.

“That was pretty cool because I flew solo around Baton Rouge every morning giving traffic updates. I did that for four months in a single engine, four seat plane,” Mora explained.

With a recommendation from his flight instructor at Louisiana Tech, in October, 2004, Mora began flying for Great Lakes Airline, a regional airline for United and Frontier Airlines. He flew a small prop plane out of Denver that housed 19 passengers and called on 26 small cities in the northwest.

He elaborated, “My route was basically paid for by the government, since the towns were so small and no large airline would travel to them.”

“The experience was just phenomenal. Being based out of Denver, I was flying in the mountains, seeing lots of snow, and witnessing all kinds of weather. And those planes did not have auto pilots, so I had to hand fly everything. It was just great.”

In 2005 he was hired by US Airways Express and was based in several different cities, including Dayton, OH; Knoxville, TN; and Charlotte, NC. For US Air he was flying 70 passenger regional jets for the company.

“The transition to those planes was amazing; I was flying the Cadillac of jets. I had a totally computerized cockpit and auto-pilot capabilities. We also had two flight attendants who served our passengers. This felt more like I was flying a real airplane,” Mora remembered.

He worked at US Air until November, 2008, when the George Shinn connection occurred. “It was weird how all this happened and this might get confusing. My sister was working at East Jefferson Hospital with a friend whose husband worked at Atlantic Aviation, which services and fuels all the private jets at the New Orleans International Airport.

“My sister was telling her friend how I was a pilot who worked crazy hours for an airline out west. That’s when my sister’s friend told her that the New Orleans Hornets owner, George Shinn, was looking for a pilot for his private jet,” Mora said.

Mora said his sister immediately text-messaged him asking if he could fly a Cessna jet. He texted back that he could, and asked why she was inquiring. She replied via text-message that the owner of the Hornets was looking for a co-pilot for his jet.

“I called her immediately after I received her text and said, ‘no way!’, and she gave me all the details,” Mora said.



Mora's sister told him to call her friend's husband at Atlantic Aviation who put him in contact with David Solar, the chief pilot for Swish Air, Shinn's company that owns his jet.

He continued, "I spoke with David Solar by telephone and he invited me to meet him at Lakefront Airport in New Orleans. I happened to be in town, so I went over to the airport, met with him, and we flew the jet from Lakefront Airport to Moisant (New Orleans International). After that initial flight, he asked me to fly as co-pilot with him and George Shinn to a business trip to New Jersey."



During that trip to New Jersey, chief pilot David Solar offered Mora the job as co-pilot of George Shinn's private jet.

"I met with the chief pilot several times, he saw my work, and noticed how I interacted with the passengers, so he was pleased with how I handled myself," he said.

Mora said he was not looking for the job, because he had been at US Airways for three years and had been upgraded to captain on a 70-passenger jet. He was captain for six months, but then the national economy affected the company and he was downgraded to first officer along with 30 other captains.

"I had no plans of leaving US Air, but the thought of being home and flying George Shinn's jet was overpowering. In November, 2008, I went from a 70 passenger plane to a seven seat jet," he said.

Mora said he's flown Shinn on several business trips to Florida, North Carolina, New Jersey and New York, Lake Tahoe, and Mexico. He said that as the Hornets head into the second half of their season, he expects to be flying the owner to more games and the NBA playoffs.

He said he has had limited access to the Hornets players but did meet Chris Paul, Coach Bryon Scott and the other players at a recent Christmas party in the Warehouse District.

"With my other jobs I was flying 80 to 90 hours a month and almost 1,000 a year, but now I fly a lot less. The last time I flew was three weeks ago, but I must be ready to depart at a moment's notice," he explained.

Mora said he is now experiencing the normal, everyday work schedule of a corporate jet pilot and he's trying to get used to the new schedule.

He said he primarily flies George Shinn and his wife to various locations and finds them extremely nice and very religious. "Chief pilot Solar told me how George Shinn had told him how he felt the Hornets should be back in New Orleans following the team's two year hiatus to Oklahoma City because of Hurricane Katrina. The owner prayed about his decision and felt in his heart that he should return to New Orleans."

Mora's future plans are simple: "As long as they have a plane and George Shinn wants me, I'm happy. I could stay in this same job until I'm 66 years old."

He likes the job's perks too. When he flies the jet out of town, Swish Air pays for everything, including food, hotel, rental car, and other expenses that may occur.

The pilot also remembers when Shinn asked him to drive his personal BMW to Charlotte, NC, and how the owner paid for Mora and his girlfriend to fly back home to New Orleans after the long drive in time for Christmas.

“This is definitely a first-class operation and I love every minute of it. I miss the more extensive flying times I had before, but being a corporate pilot is the best,” Mora said.

Archbishop Rummel alumnus Luis Mora, '00, has achieved his ultimate “dream job” that he had only imagined back in his youth. He is pilot of a corporate jet for the owner of an NBA basketball team and definitely living the good life.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *This is the next in a series of website feature articles that will highlight outstanding achievements of Archbishop Rummel High School alumni, faculty members, parents, or students. The website intends to make this “Raider Highlight” feature a weekly link on the front page of the site.*

So we can feature other prominent individuals, please submit names of persons from our school family who are doing outstanding work in their fields. If you know of anyone who could be featured, please email Joseph Serio, communications director, at jserio@rummelraiders.com or news@rummelraiders.com. Please check weekly for updates to this “Raider Highlight” link on the Archbishop Rummel website.