

## Money saved by filling empty jets

**BY STACIE HAMEL**  
**WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER**

Travelers looking to step up from first class don't have to buy even a piece of a private jet to feel like they own one.

They can cash in on a relative bargain known as an empty leg. That's the term for the return flight after a private jet has dropped off its passengers at their destination.

How much of a bargain? How about \$14,200 for a flight from Chicago to Palm Springs on a light jet that seats up to seven passengers. Compare that to the usual price of \$20,300, cited by OneSky Jets, a broker specializing in selling seats on private jets, both charter and fractional. That price doesn't include the return flight, however.

Selling space on private jets helps offset ownership costs, said Greg Johnson, founder and chief executive of the New Hampshire-based company.

"I've realized that about 40 percent of the time these planes are flying empty," he said.

OneSky allows customers to search its Web site for flights, but Johnson said those are only potential flights, not a published schedule like a commercial airline is allowed.

"It's a glimpse of what may happen. It's not guaranteed to happen," he said. "OneSky does not publish fares. The empty legs posted on our Web site represent a snapshot of estimated pricing and potential availability. They do not represent a firm price or schedule."

Blue Star Jets bill itself as the world's largest broker of one-way flights.

"We have indeed the largest inventory. We work with every charter company worldwide," said Marco Larsen, vice president of publicity for the New York City-based company.

Blue Star's membership has increased through the sale of empty legs, he said, though the company doesn't list potential flights on its Web site. The potential flights are too numerous and change too frequently for people to view them on the Internet, he said.

"We prefer that customers speak with brokers," he said. "We have an intranet where one-ways come up all the time."

Empty legs aren't offered at NetJets. Is the company founded by Richard Santulli, who created the fractional jet concept, considering selling them?

"Unequivocally not," said Donn Seidholz, Omaha-based spokesman for NetJets, which is owned by Berkshire Hathaway. "Priority number one is to take care of the people who have made long-term investments with us and rely on us to provide superior customer service and on-time departures."

If an owner called wanting a flight immediately and a plane wasn't available because it was taking care of an empty-leg customer, "we would definitely be letting our owners down."

"The customer you have in your hand is way more valuable than the customer who comes in for a quick purchase," Seidholz said.

Owners may have last-minute schedule changes, requiring that planes be available, he said.

Seidholz himself once tried to take an empty NetJets flight to New York for a meeting, and the flight was diverted midair when an owner needed the plane.

"I missed the meeting," he said.

Seidholz said he often is asked whether NetJets would sell empty legs.

"We invented the concept of fractional ownership and, without being arrogant, I'd like to think we're the foremost experts on how this concept works. We've decided it just doesn't make any sense at all for us."