**Slave Lake Helicopters**

When George Kelham established Slave Lake Helicopters in northern Alberta, he knew that the AS350 AStar would become the backbone of his commercial charter fleet.

It was four years after Kelham began training as a helicopter pilot in Calgary in 1980 that he received a new AS350 to fly when he took over management of Peace Helicopters' Slave Lake, Alberta base in 1984.

"I felt like I had hit the jackpot when I started flying the AS350," recalls Kelham. "It was faster, smoother, more comfortable and more powerful than the aircraft it replaced."

Kelham continued to fly AS350's when he opened new bases in Slave Lake for Remote Helicopters and later Delta Helicopters. He finally bought his own after founding his company, Slave Lake Helicopters in January 1998.

For the past 16 years, four market sectors – oil and gas, forestry, tree planting and utility work – have accounted for most of the company flying with aircraft selection being customer driven.

Today, Slave Lake's six aircraft are made by Airbus including one EC120, three AS350 B2's and a high performance AS350 B3e, delivered from the Fort Erie facility in 2013.

"We added our first EC120 in 2008 to modernize our fleet with a quieter five seat helicopter with air conditioning," says Kelham. "During the summer, the EC120 is regularly hired by the Alberta government to fly overhead teams managing the suppression of major forest fires."

The three AS350 B2's are the foundation of the fleet with the AS350 B3e providing more payload capacity.

"On fire contracts the AS350 B3e carries more payload, more fuel and can fly longer missions. Another advantage is that it can lift a 240 US gallon Bambi bucket, which is 30% more water than we can lift in the 180 US gallon bucket we use on our AS350 B2's," says Kelham.

Slave Lake Helicopters is particularly proud of its role supporting re-forestation programs in northern Alberta since 1998.

In fact, in July 2014, the company flew 100 millionth seedling to a remote job site in a cargo net attached to the belly hook of the AS350 B3e.

"We'll fly the crews into the remote job sites in the morning and back out to the road at night and keep them supplied with between 80,000 and 100,000 seedlings every day."

“Increased productivity is very important because our customers carefully track all expenses including their helicopter costs on a per seedling delivery basis.”

Over the past couple years, Kelham has been upgrading his Airbus Helicopters fleet with a Sagem Avionics glass cockpits with all the avionics upgrade work done by Airbus Helicopters in Fort Erie, Ontario.

Kelham says the benefits of upgrading from analogue instruments to a glass cockpit include “weight savings, reduced maintenance and greater reliability.”