

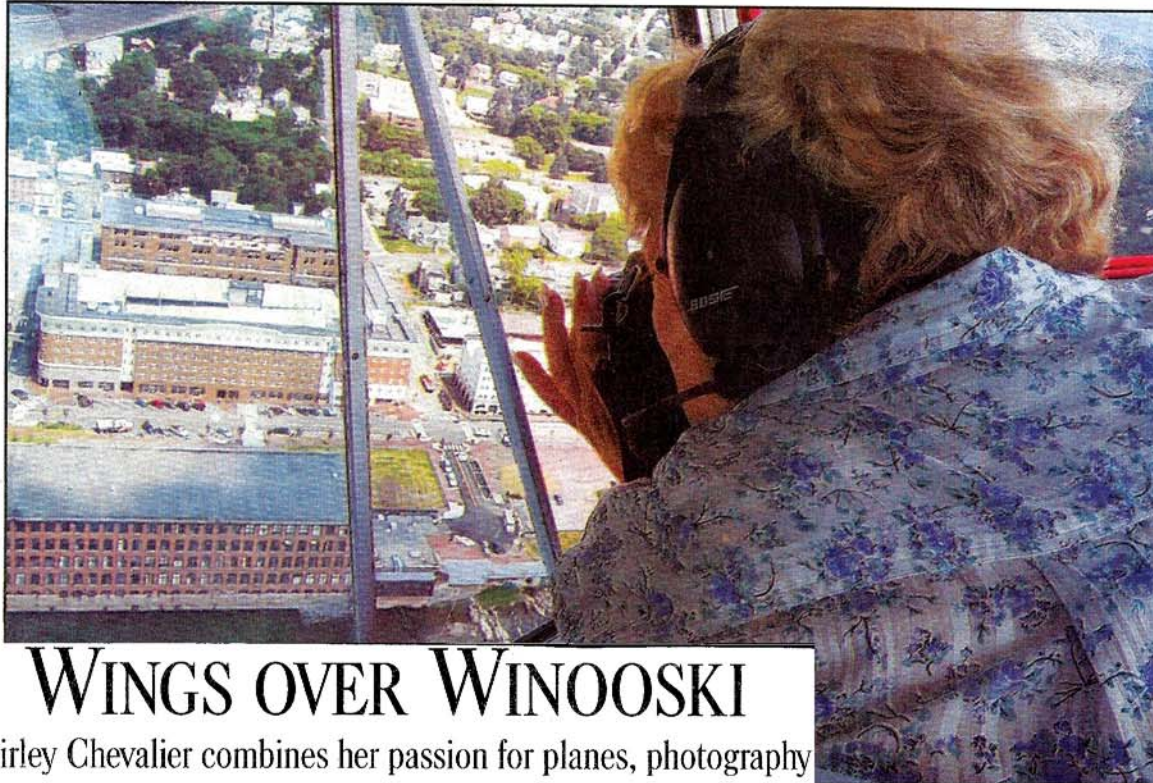


SECTION

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VERMONT

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WINGS OVER WINOOSKI

Shirley Chevalier combines her passion for planes, photography

By Matt Sutkoski
Free Press Staff Writer

WINOOSKI — Some people can barely walk and chew gum at the same time. Shirley Chevalier can simultaneously pilot a single-engine airplane and take professional photographs of the landscape and buildings 1,000 feet below.

Chevalier, 64, of Colchester is the exuberant proprietor of Fli-Rite Aviation. Her task Tuesday was to document the progress of downtown Winooski's renaissance, a job she completed with laughter and good-natured banter with air traffic controllers.

A pilot for more than two decades, she often buzzes over Vermont's landmarks, construction sites and scenic spots in her gleaming, fully restored 1959 American Champion plane. Customers hire Chevalier because they like to document the

progress of major construction projects, such as student housing and the Dudley H. Davis Center at the University of Vermont, the Lime Kiln Bridge replacement and the Severance Corners development project in Colchester.

Chevalier said the business is her dream job, combining her twin loves of flying and photography. "It's very much part of me. It's who I am," she said, tapping the side of her plane as she got ready to depart from Burlington International Airport on Tuesday morning.

Once in the hangar, she grabbed her 1,600-pound plane and pulled it out with about the same ease someone would maneuver a fully loaded shopping cart. A careful pre-flight check took about five minutes. The weather report revealed benign conditions

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FLY: Colchester pilot pursues twin passions

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as predicted thunderstorms were yet to materialize. She declared herself satisfied and ready for takeoff. "She's running like a charm," Chevalier said.

Chevalier radioed the tower: "We'll be over Winooski, taking photos," she said. Chevalier has an easy rapport with air traffic controllers and other airport personnel. She used to work in the airport manager's office and has held a pilot's license since 1983. Her aerial photography business started in August 2004 and demand has grown, she said. She's at the airport almost every day.

Cleared for takeoff, Chevalier zoomed smoothly down a runway and glided off toward nearby Winooski. An air traffic controller alerted her to another plane far to the southwest, which Chevalier had already seen. "These guys watch out for me like a mother hen. They are fabulous to me," she said.

She positioned the plane

Fli-Rite Aviation

- **WHAT:** Aerial photography of construction sites, property, scenic vistas, events, other subjects.
- **OWNER:** Shirley Chevalier
- **PHONE:** 878-4432
- **ON THE WEB:** www.FliRite.com

over Winooski, running in leisurely circles over the city's downtown. She quickly snapped some photos out the open side window while still controlling the plane. Her excitement rose. "Yes! My! Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, much like a fashion photographer shooting a supermodel.

Between shots, she kept the small plane on an even keel, navigating smoothly through steady crosswinds. No bumps, no pitches, no rolls. As she shot her photos, workers about 1,000 feet below continued work on

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MATT SUTKOSKI, Free Press
Aerial photographer and pilot Shirley Chevalier with her 1959 restored American Champion airplane.

downtown apartment buildings under construction. People sat on park benches along the city's new River Walk.

Chevalier took one more circle over the city, wanting to capture the buildings under construction, the Champlain Mill, and the water rushing by in the Winooski River. She worried a slight haze would hinder her shot. She needn't have worried. "Ooh, nice shot! Got what I needed. Whee!"

Chevalier is reluctant to go into details about how much she charges. The cost varies greatly depending on

the job. And she has a lot of overhead, with insurance and rising fuel costs taking a big bite out of her budget.

She flew a few feet above the runway toward her hangar. "I'll fly to the other end of the runway. To hell with taxiing," she said. Near the end of the runway she set the plane down with an almost imperceptible thump. The flight was over within 25 minutes.

"I'm having the time of my life. I'm going to do it for as long as I possibly can," she said.

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