

EMORY

lawyer

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SAFE PASSAGE

*Randy Davis 79L flies Ebola patients
to life-saving treatment*



2 Puzzling through **public health law**

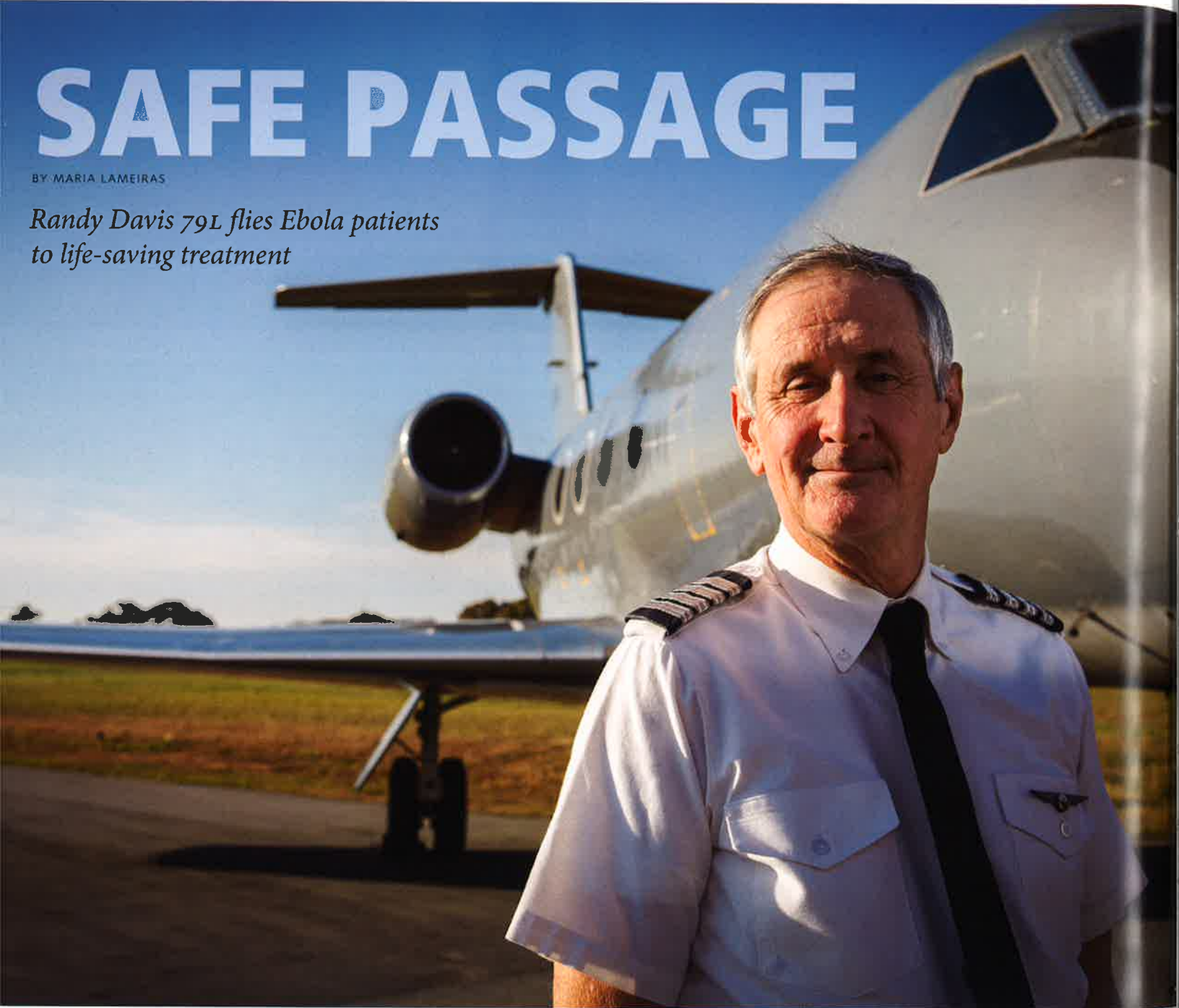
10 **\$1 million gift** from **Professor William J. Carney** challenges alumni to support transactional law

13 **Judge William C. O'Kelley 51C 53L** wins the Emory Medal

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BY MARIA LAMEIRAS

Randy Davis 79L flies Ebola patients to life-saving treatment



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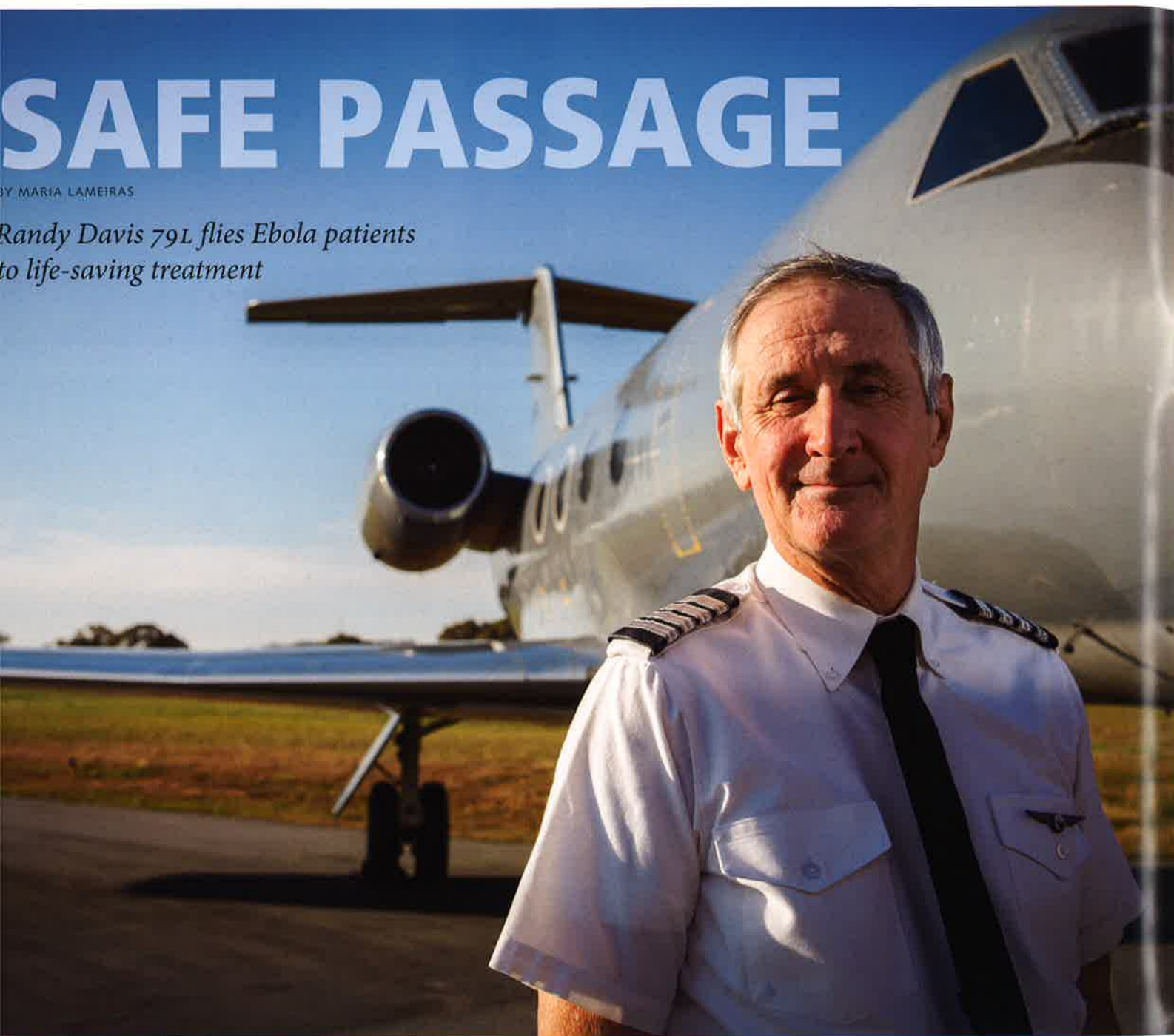
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By the time he graduated from Amherst College, Davis knew he wanted to focus on aviation law. Given that, he decided to “put down roots in a great aviation town.” During his time at Emory Law, he got to know some Atlanta lawyers through giving lessons and piloting

charters. Upon graduating, he joined the Atlanta firm Neely & Player. In his dozen years there, Davis specialized in aviation litigation and earned his “type rating” to fly Learjets. Among his clients was Phoenix Air, which he joined in 1990 as its first in-house general counsel.

“I deal with insurance defense, employee issues, the types of things any general counsel has to deal with,” he says. “Then there are a lot of general contracts, but I am always doing a lot of contracts with clients to provide aircraft services, some of which are very specialized.”

Among these services is the impressive air ambulance that Phoenix Air recently has provided for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), under whose auspices the American Ebola patients returned from Africa for treatment. The same air ambulance was used to fly the Dallas nurses who contracted Ebola for treatment at Emory University Hospital and the National Institutes of Health’s Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

For Phoenix Air, it started about 10 years ago while the company was under contract with the CDC to provide passenger and specimen transport services. Congress directed the CDC to develop a safe aircraft transport system for government employees exposed to highly contagious diseases. Working with Department of Defense (DOD) biological warfare specialists and CDC disease specialists, Phoenix Air’s technical team was intimately involved in the development of the Airborne Biological Containment System (ABCS) used in August to transport physician Kent Brantly and volunteer Nancy Writebol from Liberia to Atlanta.

Currently the two special-missions Gulfstream G-III jets owned and operated by Phoenix Air are the only two aircraft in the world certified by the CDC, DOD, and FAA for deploying the system. In late July 2014, Phoenix Air got a call from the State Department asking if it would be possible to use the ABCS to transport Ebola patients.

Soon, a mock unit was set up on a hangar floor at Phoenix Air, and teams from the State Department, the CDC, and Phoenix Air were running practice drills and discussing safety protocols. The State Department then asked if Phoenix Air could be ready to leave promptly for Liberia to transport Kent Brantly to Atlanta for treatment at Emory Hospital’s isolation unit.

Davis was among the first to step up for the mission and one of three pilots on the flight that brought Writebol to the United States. “On a normal flight, if something started to go really wrong with the patient, we would land at the closest suitable airfield, but not with these patients. We were told that, other than for an aircraft emergency, we could not land anywhere but Dobbins Air Force Base,” Davis says. “The patients and

their families understood this. Our mission was to get them here.”

Davis is no stranger to important missions. In the hours after the 9/11 terror attacks, the government contacted Phoenix Air to transport high-level officials to Stewart Air National Guard Base, about an hour outside New York City. Davis was the first to step forward for that mission as well, flying nearly 2,000 miles as he picked up passengers in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, South and North Carolina, and New York.

As perhaps the only civilian plane in the air that day, the flight was assigned a unique transponder code from the North American Defense Command, giving the mission clearance for a nonmilitary flight. “We would be flying along, and an unlit F-16 fighter would rise up — almost as an apparition — in the night sky next to us, check us out, then slowly sink out of sight,” Davis says.

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“We’ve flown wolves from Canada to Siberia for a film, dolphins from Bermuda and Hawaii to an aquarium in the US, Emperor penguin chicks from Antarctica and New Zealand to the San Diego Zoo,” Davis says.

Although he has had his share of dramatic encounters, some moments have been purely comedic.

“We were getting fueled up in Siberia. We landed at Magadan, and a rickety, old fuel truck was fueling us. A light, dry snow was starting. Our handler came out and asked if we would like the de-icing team to come out,” Davis says. “In the distance we see a large woman with a broom come out of a building. They hoist her up on the wing, and she starts sweeping off the snow, smiling at us. That was the de-icing team.”

Taking on these highly specialized missions is Phoenix Air’s business and part of what attracted Davis to his unique role with the company.

“Anytime you are flying folks for an extremely time-sensitive purpose, especially people who are as sick as these [Ebola] patients were, this airplane, this equipment is the only way to get them where they need to go safely, efficiently, and in a timely manner,” he says. “That’s one example of what our specialized aviation work is all about.”