

Sky's the Limit for Latina Entrepreneur

White Plains, NY- It was a time when people used to dress up for air travel. Then 10-year old Millie Hernandez-Becker, taking her first trip on a plane for a family visit to Puerto Rico, thought working for an airline would be the most glamorous thing in the world. That awe-inspiring experience for the youngster turned into a life-long passion for air travel that eventually led to ownership of her own airways.

A native Manhattanite, Hernandez-Becker was 22 and teaching grade school in New York City when she took a part-time job as a reservation agent for New York Air at LaGuardia Airport. The excitement she found in that position caused Hernandez-Becker to ditch her teaching career for a new one in the airline industry. She continued to work her way up at New York Air until she caught the eye of David M. Becker, the owner of Westchester Air in Westchester, New York. Becker hired her away from New York Air and by 1990 the passionate-about-air-travel couple was married.

Tragedy struck in 1994 when Becker, a pilot, died in a plane crash, leaving Hernandez-Becker to handle the reins of their "baby," Westchester Air. The hardest thing she says she's ever had to do was sit in his chair as president and CEO the day after the funeral. She recalls the ensuing period as the hardest of her life, but she had decided quitting was not an option. With that determination life got better. She re-married in 1998 and with her husband Thomas is now raising a real baby, John Charles.

Ms. Hernandez-Becker built the Westchester Air--- now Jet Equity--- into a major local charter company with 22 employees, 5 planes with routes all over North America, and clients ranging from Playtex to Phillips-Van Heusen.

At critical junctures in the company's growth in the 90's--- what she refers to as the company's toddler years--- Hernandez Becker turned to bank financing guaranteed by the U.S. Small Business Administration three different times. The company paid those three loans off and eventually drew the attention--- and investment--- of venture capitalists. Now general manager of Jet Equity, Hernandez-Becker expects to use that financing to grow the business to new heights. Bittersweet as it is, since September 11

increased Jet Equity's business by 40 percent. Hernandez-Becker believes that growth is due people's trust in her operation's maintenance and security procedures.

As a result of her determination to succeed and her business acumen, Hernandez-Becker was a recipient of the Business Woman of the Year award from the Northeast Chapter of the U.S.-Hispanic Chamber of commerce.