



Stinis left a corporate career to co-helm the family business.

The Fastest Skywriter in the World

For Stephen Stinis, an attention-grabbing flying trick is part of a family tradition

MY FAMILY has been skywriting for more than 80 years and three generations. My grandfather Andy Stinis was writing “Pepsi” in the sky before people knew what Pepsi was. He wrote it more than 7,000 times.

Andy invented and patented skytyping. He said to himself, “It takes forever to write this one word.

There has to be a faster way.” So he figured out how to write a message in the sky with a group of planes flying abreast—five planes, minimum. Skytyping is sort of like making a dot matrix printout in the sky. A message of 20 to 25 characters takes only about three minutes to do. The height of each letter is 1,200 feet—almost as tall as the Empire State Building. We’re the only people in the world who do skytyping. We’ve got the patents.

My father, Greg, was skywriting before he could drive a car. And I went on skywriting and skytyping missions with him from the age of 5. I basically grew up in the back of a plane.

My mother would say, “Get an education! I don’t want you to do what your dad does!” And I did that—I got a bachelor’s degree in finance, spent 10 or 11 years in the corporate world. But the Stinis men have a passion for flying. In 2009, my father and I be-

came 50–50 partners in the company, and we still run the business together.

We usually wait until we have 10 messages commissioned before we fly, to make it cost-effective. In 2021, we had one guy who wanted to skytype a proposal over the Santa Monica Pier on a particular day. So he bought 10 messages, including “I love you more than anything,” “Excited to spend my life with you” and “Will you marry me?”

When you’re on the ground and you start seeing a letter being formed in the sky, there’s a bit of romance behind it. People take a minute to stare. They want to see what the next letter’s going to be. And we fly so high that they can’t even see the airplanes. It’s like God is writing to them. —As told to Natasha Stoyanoff

Stephen Stinis, 50, co-owner and president of Skytypers Inc., lives in Chino, California.