

## First In

**Jim Cooling founded a law firm in 1977 on a shoe string.  
It was 1980 before he had saved enough to buy his first plane.**



High above downtown Kansas City, in a corner office of a glass skyscraper, sits Jim Cooling. His neighbors are jealous. Cooling's law firm signed its first lease on their space before most of the other tenants knew the building existed, and so enjoys a rent that includes a degree of "incentive" for which later tenants failed to qualify, which makes Jim happy – not at the misfortune of his neighbors, but that he was there first.

Cooling has been there first often. The lead attorney at Cooling & Herbers, a 25-person insurance defense and transactional law firm, Cooling is ruffled, and fun, and a pilot. Aside from being a good lawyer (few really bad lawyers get corner offices), Cooling has built a successful international law practice in part on his mobility – getting there first.

It didn't exactly begin that way. "When we started, we were just a local firm, with local business. For the first year and a half, we pretty much concentrated on our home turf, to ensure that we didn't stub our toe starting a new business. We hoped that gradually people would hear a little bit about the work we were doing and people in other parts of the state would want our services. I learned that I needed an airplane to do that. We were learning that if we were to continue to be involved in cases that were further and further away (People started to talk to us about cases in western Kansas. Well, it's a long way to western Kansas), with the airplane, our market range expanded, and our sense of what we might take on expanded as well. "With four young children, just starting out," he says, "there's a big difference between being gone for three days and being gone for just one day. If we had a case in West Plains, Missouri, which was west of the Ozark Mountains, it was a six-hour drive from Kansas City, but it was a 55-minute flight, so you could get your business done and come back home. We found that we had cases like that in Kansas, and

Nebraska, and Arkansas. Unless you had a way to get out and back in the same day, it took three days to do the trip.”

With the airplane, Jim’s family was happier, which made Jim happier. Gradually, their market grew, from local to regional to national, in an ever-enlarging circle drawn around Kansas City. Eventually, they began taking international clients.

“The airplane gave us instant credibility. It really allowed us to expand our law practice because we could take cases that I would not have taken had we not have been able to run back and forth and be able to deal with court filings, depositions, hearings, etc. The airplane helped business. It allowed us to get there earlier, no matter where we were needed.

“Being able to go when you want to go – for a trial or a meeting, and it’s a holiday weekend, and the judge schedules a hearing for that Monday, and you need to meet with an expert witness in Ames, Iowa, before the hearing on Monday – there’s no way you can go on the airlines. The airlines do supplement the airplane, and I’ve even taken it to Canada and Mexico. But regional trips to small towns are its best use.

“What people may not know is that if I’m going to Dallas, my final destination may be to some small town northeast of town. It’s faster for me to go there directly than to fly to DFW and rent a car,” he says.

Whatever gets him there first.