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**In two years, KU athletic director tallied a big bill flying on private planes**

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In February 2009, Kansas athletic director Lew Perkins flew from Lawrence to Columbia, Mo., by executive-style jet to attend the Jayhawks' basketball game against Missouri.

Coach Bill Self and his defending national champions took a bus.

Perkins' expenses that night — \$1,983 for the flight and \$380 for ground transportation — make up a small piece of the big picture when it comes to his travel.

He charged the athletic department more than \$150,000 from July 2008 to May 2010 for 22 flights on university-owned and leased planes, according to a review of Perkins' travel vouchers.

That figure does not include 23 other private flights Perkins took in that time — seven on boosters' planes, four cited on Perkins' vouchers without a cost and 12 that were reported on the expense reports of other KU staffers who joined Perkins on a trip.

Kansas State athletic director John Currie doesn't fly private planes at anywhere near the same rate. In the 15 months Currie has been athletic director, he has taken 10 private flights costing \$28,430, according to university records.

In 2009, when Perkins earned a bonus-laden \$4.4 million at KU, he charged the athletic department at least \$107,000 for 22 private flights, records show. First-class commercial flights would have cost a small fraction of that.

"In my world, time is very important," Perkins said. "I consider my time very valuable. That's one of the reasons why we have planes, to help us get places quicker."

In some cases, Perkins flew when he could have driven in three hours or less — to such cities as Wichita, Hutchinson, and Lincoln, Neb.

He also flew to places like New York, Rhode Island and Palm Springs, Calif., usually on the university's eight-seat Cessna Citation Bravo jet. When he couldn't get the university's plane, he chartered one or used planes owned by boosters.

Once, a booster's plane carried Perkins back from a family visit to New Orleans, where his daughter and son-in-law work for Tulane University.

On many of his trips, he hired a car service to get around. He spent about \$7,000 on

ground transportation in the 22-month period studied, including \$1,827 during one two-day stay in New York.

Closer to home, Perkins took the university's jet the 139 miles to Pittsburg this year to attend the funeral of former K-State quarterback Dylan Meier, whose younger brother, Kerry, had just finished his football career at KU.

K-State football coach Bill Snyder also flew in, arriving on a university plane from Manhattan.

Both needed to get from the airport to the funeral.

Perkins charged \$425 for a car service.

Snyder rented a car for \$44.

### **Big Easy confusion**

In October 2008, Perkins claimed an \$8,800 expense for a trip to New Orleans, indicating on his travel voucher that his purpose was to meet with Tulane athletic director Rick Dickson.

The \$8,800 was for flying on a private plane — a King Air turboprop owned by Tim Fritzel, a major KU donor.

When asked about the trip Wednesday, Perkins said he couldn't remember the meeting's topic, and he seemed surprised at the cost, asking: "How did I spend \$8,000?"

Perkins said that he visited family during the trip. His daughter, Amy Macneill, works at the Tulane business school. His son-in-law, Brandon Macneill, had landed a job four months earlier working for Dickson as executive associate athletic director.

Perkins acknowledged that a personal trip may have been charged accidentally to KU.

"We'll take care of that immediately," he said. "We don't expect the university to pay.... If that's a screw-up, it's an honest screw-up."

After researching further, Perkins called Thursday with new details.

He said he paid his own way to New Orleans after attending a KU football game in Norman, Okla. While in the Big Easy, he advised Tulane athletic officials about an upcoming fundraising campaign. The advice had nothing to do with KU, so it was not business related, he said. He intended to return to Lawrence on his own dime.

A Tulane official said on Friday that Perkins had dinner at Dickson's home.

While in New Orleans, an emergency arose at KU that required his immediate attention, Perkins said. Because Perkins needed to return immediately, KU approved his request to fly on Fritzel's plane, which was sent at \$2,000 an hour from Lawrence to New Orleans.

"This was not a boondoggle," Perkins said. "I had to get back right away."

Perkins would not elaborate on what required such a quick return.

After the athletic department paid Fritzel for the trip, Fritzel wrote a check back to KU for the same amount as a "gift" to the athletic department, records show.

Fritzel did not return calls seeking comment. KU officials say Fritzel handles his transactions this way so he can more easily claim a tax exemption.

Bottom line, Perkins said, is that his emergency ride back to Lawrence cost KU nothing.

But his explanation raises other questions. Why did he portray the trip on an expense voucher as a reimbursable trip to talk with Tulane's athletic director? Why didn't he describe it as an emergency return from a family vacation?

Perkins said that he "should probably look at every detail" of travel vouchers but that he lets his administrative assistants handle most of them.

"I am not going to hide that I obviously did some family stuff there, too," Perkins said. "That's why initially everything we were doing was on our own."

Perkins said he's only been pulled away from personal time for work emergencies a few times in his seven years at KU.

Even though it's happened rarely, Perkins said, he didn't remember the New Orleans situation at first because, "It happened over two years ago.

"I'm old," said Perkins, who turned 65 in March and has announced a September 2011 retirement. "I can't remember yesterday. I wish I could tell you my mind is better than it is."

This is not the first time Perkins has had to clarify personal versus professional expenses. Earlier this year, the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission was asked to look into Perkins' use of \$15,000 worth of exercise equipment he had borrowed from a Kansas Athletics Inc. vendor. In an attempt to resolve the issue, Perkins sent a \$5,000 personal check to the vendor in April.

State employees are prohibited by law from accepting gifts.

### **Air options**

KU boosters who donate flight hours can be reimbursed for the cost or earn priority points for their Williams Educational Fund accounts, which help them secure good seats at KU athletic events.

Perkins has used planes owned by Fritzel and Ren Newcomer, who each give at least \$50,000 a year to the Williams Fund.

At Kansas State, the athletic department uses a Beechcraft King Air owned by the university and a leased Cessna CitationJet.

"Typically, we use them for missions that cannot be accomplished without them," Currie said. "If there are places that are difficult to get to or the time frame isn't realistic, we'll use one."

But seldom to games. Currie flew the school plane to the Wildcats' men's basketball NCAA West Regional appearance in Salt Lake City, with a stop in Greeley, Colo., to visit donors. That trip, which included four other athletic department members, cost K-State \$7,557.

In his first three months on the job, Currie used a university plane five times. He's used it five times since, partly because American Airlines started daily service from Manhattan to Dallas a year ago this month.

"I can go to a meeting in Dallas for a \$300 round-trip ticket," Currie said. "And it takes me five minutes to get to the airport here. We're fortunate to have that and it shows that every school's situation is a little different."

### **Convenient flying**

Perkins often traveled on executive planes up to three times a month, records show. On at least five of those flights, Perkins or Perkins and his wife were the only passengers on a six- or eight-seat plane.

It should be noted, Perkins said, that he often travels with other members of the athletic department or donors. In those cases, it is not just his airfare that is being covered.

As part of Perkins' employment agreement, he can fly first class on KU business. But he rarely does so, according to records.

Once, he flew on US Airways for \$1,883 to Phoenix for the "Fiesta Frolic," an annual golf retreat for college football officials. Another time, he flew on American Airlines for \$720 from a KU baseball game in Raleigh, N.C., to Dallas for a Big 12 meeting.

He returned to Lawrence from Dallas aboard a university plane. The cost: \$3,397.

"Going commercial is an option," Perkins said. "But there's a lot of places we can't get to

on commercial flights. You can miss flights, all those things. Please understand. I don't look at it as a luxury. It's just a convenience."

The cost difference can be significant. Consider some Perkins' trips:

\* September 2008, Big 12 board meeting in Grapevine, Texas, which abuts Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Cost: \$10,300 on a university plane, plus \$128 in landing fees. A first-class ticket would have been about \$850.

\* October 2008, Basketball Hall of Fame board meeting in Indianapolis. Cost: \$5,373 on a university plane. A first-class ticket: about \$900.

\* December 2008, National Football Foundation Awards ceremony in New York. Cost: \$13,000 on a university plane, plus \$564 for a car service. A first-class ticket: about \$950.

On those three examples alone, the cost difference exceeded \$26,000.

Perkins' desire to fly charter even extends to his pets. He acknowledged that he once chartered Fritzel's plane to fly to North Carolina to pick up a dog he had purchased. Perkins said he reimbursed Fritzel personally.

Donors are at the center of many of Perkins' KU-related trips.

When he attended a donor golf outing in Palm Springs, Calif., in January 2009, the flight cost the athletic department \$22,000.

"It's donor cultivation," said Sean Lester, a KU associate athletic director. "It's part of our business."

Jim Marchiony, another associate athletics director, explained it this way:

"Walk around KU facilities right now, and you'll see how important donor cultivation is. And compare what you see today with what was here seven years ago."

Indeed, Kansas has modernized under Perkins' tenure, and much of that is due to success in fundraising. KU's football team trains in a \$31 million practice facility, and the university completed \$42 million in renovations and additions to Allen Fieldhouse in 2009.

Yet some donors have complained in recent months about the ticketing problems at KU events. Several Williams Fund and KU ticket office employees resigned earlier this year, after federal officials began investigating millions of dollars worth of missing tickets.

Perkins, who will be due a \$600,000 retention payment if he remains athletic director until June 30, 2011, said his travel is all about supporting the KU athletes, like the ones

that won the 2008 Orange Bowl in football and the men's basketball national championship that year.

Perkins likes to attend every away basketball game. During a three-week stretch of the 2008-09 season, he took private planes to games at Iowa State, Nebraska and Missouri.

"The team buses or drives to Iowa State, it's a five-hour drive each way," Perkins said. "I can get in and leave right away. It definitely is, from a business standpoint, a time-saver for me."

To Perkins, it's a question of how valuable one's time is.

"That's just the price of doing business," he said.