ASK THE EXPERT

Virgil Pizer
CEO at Pem-Air

Learn How Pem-Air's Flexible Approach Keeps Small and Mid-Sized Operators Flying

As major MROs prioritize high-volume, industrialized maintenance, smaller operators are often left competing for limited capacity—creating a growing gap in the market. Recently Aviation Week spoke with Virgil Pizer, CEO of PEM-AIR Turbine Engine Services, to learn how the company leverages its size, flexibility, and customer-first approach to serve operators who need responsive maintenance solutions.

Q Aviation Week: What specific gaps in the MRO market led you to focus on smaller and mid-sized operators?

A Virgil Pizer: The industry has fundamentally changed since the pandemic, especially regarding supply chain issues and challenges with new-generation engines, which have created significant backlogs. Major airlines are secured through long-term agreements, either internally or through strategic partnerships, consuming much of the available maintenance capacity.

This leaves smaller and mid-sized operators, as well as lessors, in constant competition for maintenance support. Unlike large operators who manage engine maintenance proactively—pulling engines early to reuse expensive components—smaller operators often lack the necessary internal engineering resources and strategic planning. As a result, they require comprehensive, customized support. At Pem-Air, we fill this gap by offering detailed engineering expertise, strategic advice, and various service levels beyond traditional overhaul and heavy maintenance.

Q AW: How does Pem-Air accommodate operators who need flexible scheduling but can't commit to long-term contracts?

A VP: Our size allows us to be agile and adaptable, effectively handling maintenance requirements that fall outside large-scale, long-term contracts. Smaller fleets often struggle to get attention from major MRO providers because unscheduled work disrupts their tightly managed maintenance processes. This flexibility allows us to adjust schedules, create openings, and focus specifically on smaller operators. Large MROs typically see deviations from their annual engine quotas as disruptions, whereas for us, this adaptability is our core value proposition.

Our new 80,000-sq.-ft. facility is intentionally designed to accommodate this flexibility, allowing us to manage a variety of maintenance tasks simultaneously rather than following the traditional linear approach. We quickly induct engines for repair while also maintaining overflow capacity through our original facility, ensuring rapid, responsive service.

Q AW: What's your approach when operators need emergency or unscheduled engine work?

A VP: We work to get engines inducted quickly—typically within a week—for urgent, hospital-type repairs. We also offer extensive field service capabilities, something not all providers are willing to do. We call this "work away from station," allowing us to handle maintenance directly at remote locations.

For independent operators, transporting engines and managing removals can be costly and complicated, as many lack the infrastructure. Our remote maintenance capabilities help eliminate those roadblocks by allowing us to perform moderate-level maintenance directly on-site, saving both money and downtime.

Thanks to our solid relationships with OEMs, we can quickly arrange temporary engineering solutions that enable short-term engine operation while planning permanent repairs. In critical

situations, we can place engines on short-term operational watches, letting operators continue flying safely with mandated inspections every seven to ten cycles. This is particularly valuable for cargo operators, giving them essential additional flying time as we mobilize equipment and personnel for efficient, on-site repairs.

Q AW: How do you support operators who lack in-house engine-specific engineering departments?

A VP: We often serve as their outsourced engineering department for engines. Many operators have people well-educated on airframe maintenance but who aren't as experienced working with engines. That's where we fill the gap.

For example, if an engine is losing oil, we provide guided diagnostics: "It's losing oil in the HPT bleed valve pipes—that's a number-four bearing issue, probably a crack. Here's the required maintenance but check oil loss volume because if it's below a certain threshold, you can continue operating until off-wing maintenance."

Major airlines have in-house experts, but finding qualified power plant engineers at smaller operations is nearly impossible. These operators typically handle basic repairs but lack experience with performance issues. Unlike OEMs or airline-affiliated MROs with their own agendas, we focus solely on customer needs, creating partnerships that develop capabilities together for future growth.

Ultimately, our goal is to build lasting partnerships—developing capabilities alongside our customers, not just servicing their engines.