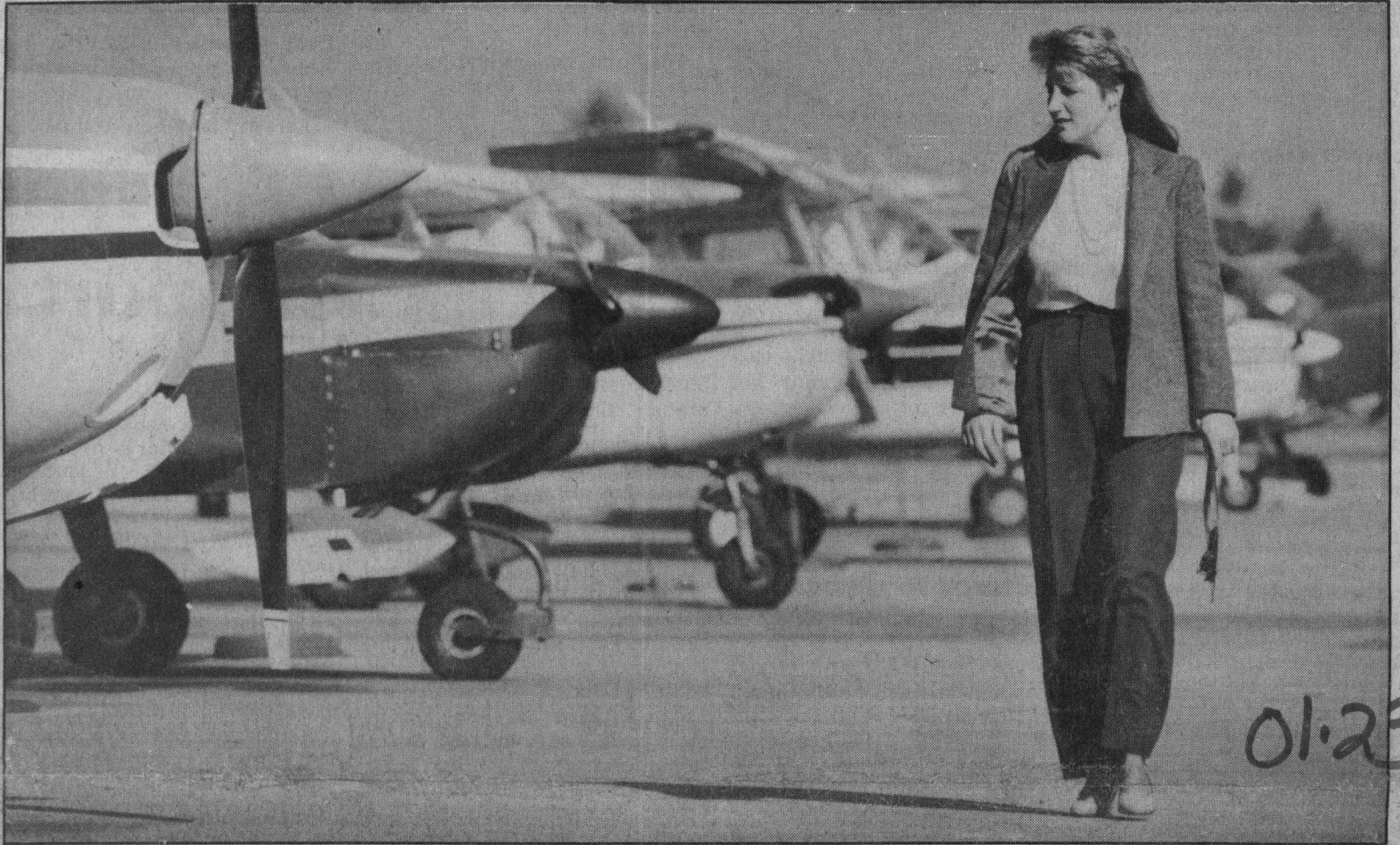


# New airport boss on job



Kurt Ellison

Kim Wirht checks out some of the airplanes that are parked at Watsonville Airport...

## Being first woman manager no big deal to Kim Wirht

By DAN FITCH  
STAFF WRITER

Mention to Kim Wirht that she is the first female airport manager in the history of Watsonville Airport and she'll get a little annoyed.

Just a little annoyed. When she says, "Do you have to ask that?" she at least says it with a smile.

Actually, Wirht has every right to be annoyed by such a question — for a number of reasons. In the first place, she is only the second airport manager Watsonville has ever had — Vern Ackerman held the position for 42 years.

Wirht also points out that she is not the first woman to hold a management position on the grounds of the airport. Kathy Pemberton has owned and operated her flight-instruction and aircraft-rental business — Bel-Air Aviation — for a year now after working as the book-keeper for two years.

And Wirht further points out there are other woman airport managers, like Joan Castaneda in Hayward, Wanda Kenney in Visalia, and Donna Murray in Yuma, Ariz.

But most important, Wirht's qualifications and

resume are impressive.

Eleven years ago, at age 24, one year after graduating from San Jose State with a degree in aeronautical engineering, Wirht was chosen from a field of 200 candidates to join CalTrans' Division of Aeronautics as a field inspector.

She said she was "one of the first" women ever chosen for that job.

Next, Wirht was chosen to be an intern to the airport director for Santa Clara County. It so happened that the director retired three months after Wirht started, and she was installed to replace him.

From there, in 1986, Wirht moved on to become airport manager of the Hollister Airport, a part-time job that required full-time attention.

"The job required the piecing together of a dissatisfied group of airport tenants," Wirht said. "We cleaned the airport up and I think restored a little faith."

And like Ackerman, Wirht has the ability to fly a multitude of different aircraft. Whether a small single-engine plane or a military behemoth, she is familiar with most aircraft and has

flown most at some point in her career.

Wirht, married and the mother of two girls, Heather, 3 and Kaylen, 23 months, found out about the Watsonville job by reading a classified ad in a newspaper.

She applied, as did 50 other people, and went through an interview and application process that she described as "truly the most interesting I have ever undergone."

Part of the process involved the completion of a four-hour "management assessment" test in which she and four other applicants simulated a day in the life of a manager — sorting, deciding, acting, delegating, relegating and things in between.

"At one point everyone was quiet and I couldn't help myself and starting giggling," Wirht said. "A file said that two employees were fighting in the parking lot and I thought, 'This is just like Hollister.'"

Wirht doesn't anticipate any fights in Watsonville. She said the other airport employees appeared to be a little nervous around her at first, until they realized she was also nervous.

She said everyone seemed



...and answers questions.

to relax once they realized she had no intention of strolling in and turning the place upside down.

"I will continue to do things as they are and learn the routine. If something is working perfectly, well, why fix it?" she said. "There is a more professional feeling here than at a lot of airports and that is to Vern's credit. He exuded an air of quality and professional service and the airport bears that."

Wirht works with a staff of seven at the airport and man-