

Timothy W. Monville  
National Transportation Safety Board  
[REDACTED]  
Washington, DC [REDACTED]

October 16, 2024

Re: ERA24LA149  
DOA: 03/02/2024  
Apopka, Florida  
N686JA

Dear Mr. Monville:

My name is James Forlaw, and as requested, I'm providing the below statement regarding my background and the incident that occurred on March 2, 2024. My address is [REDACTED] Winter Garden, FL [REDACTED] and my date of birth is [REDACTED]

I was self-employed in the landscaping business for approximately 35 years and closed my business in 2015. In 2019, after not working for several years, Mike Harrington, owner of TNT Earthworks, needed help with his landscaping business. He can only afford to pay one employee, so I decided to help him on the side. I've known Mike since the mid-90s, so I volunteered to help him for free. I am not paid. In exchange for helping, he will provide me with lunch for the day. I only help him with landscaping at the Apopka airport. Sometimes my help is only needed once a month, but if his employee does not come to work, or quits, then I may help twice per week. It takes 12-16 hours to mow and weed eat the airport property.

Prior to 2019, I did not have any experience working at an airport. When I started working for Mike, he told me to always keep my eyes open and watch for planes, and to stay off the runway and taxiway. The taxiway is very busy in the mornings, so my head is always on a swivel watching my surroundings. Mike and I consistently talk about safety while working at the airport and the importance of paying attention to everything around us. I do not wear hearing protection, headphones or earbuds so that I can hear the aircraft around me. When we are working at the airport, we notify the staff, and it is squawked on the radio that there is a mower or a landscaper on the taxiway, so that all pilots know to keep a lookout for us.

When an aircraft touches down, the pilot must drive down to the end of the runway and then turn around to taxi. I've been doing landscaping at the airport for so long, that I'm able to time how long it takes for them to touchdown, turn around, and pass me. As soon as I see the aircraft touch down, I go back to working for approximately 2-3 minutes, and then make sure to step completely off the taxiway while the aircraft passes me.

On the morning of the accident, I started landscaping around 9:00 am on the taxiway. N686JA had to taxi past me to the runway, so I'm sure the pilot saw me working. It was around 10:20 am when he landed. I watched him land, and as I always do, I approximated how long it would take him to turn around. It was apparent that he was speeding because he approached me significantly faster than any other aircraft. In my experience, a taxiing aircraft is going so slow, it can stop within a few feet. I did not hear or see the aircraft come up behind me. The wing struck

me in the back at a high rate of speed causing me to fall and strike my face on the ground. The aircraft rolled another 100 feet before it came to a stop. I feel this is another indication that it was going excessively fast down the taxiway. I remember there were two men standing by the hanger and witnessed the accident. They came over to me, but I lost consciousness and don't remember much else after I fell to the ground.

As a result of the plane running into me, I had to undergo a fusion at T10-L1. I was told that due to the extent of the fracture the surgical team had to take extra precautions extending the length of surgery. I now have screws in my back at T10, T11, T12, and L1, and must go for x-rays every 90 days for the foreseeable future to make sure the screws are secure. I have to use a bone growth stimulator for 30 minutes every evening to assist with healing the fusion. I also sustained a fracture at C5 and had to wear a neck brace for weeks. When my head struck the ground I sustained a concussion and fractured the maxilla bone which required sutures and caused several of my teeth to become partially dislodged. Since the accident I've had difficulty with word finding and remembering things, and I experience daily headaches and back pain. This accident has completely changed my life.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of James Forlaw.

James Forlaw