



WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

For Immediate Release
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Grand Rapids, MI – May 14, 2019: West Michigan Aviation Academy (WMAA) is pleased to announce that two of its first female pilot graduates will be competing in this year's prestigious Air Race Classic on July 18-21.

"We are thrilled that our graduate, Tori Gann, has chosen aviation as a career, and logged the necessary flight hours to compete in this race," says George Pavey, Dean of Aviation at WMAA. Tori graduated from WMAA in 2014 with her private pilot license. She then went on to earn her instrument rating, commercial pilot license, and her multi-engine certification. She is a Certified Flight Instructor and now flies for Northern Jet. "Our school is not even 10 years old. To have a graduate who has already achieved these qualifications is remarkable," Pavey notes.

The 2019 Air Race Classic starts in Jackson, Tennessee on July 18, and wraps up in Welland, Ontario, Canada on July 21. It covers approximately 2,500 grueling miles over varied terrain and airspace, with nine stops in between. The pilots fly under VFR (Visual Flight Rules) during daylight hours. Each team receives a handicap based on the speed of their aircraft, to equalize the race. "This is a legitimate race," Pavey continues. "It tests the team's ability to mission plan, cope with weather, and make all the right decisions. In 2018, 13 of the teams did not even finish, which tells you a bit about how difficult it is." The objective is to fly the "perfect" cross-country race. In this type of race, the official standings cannot be released until the final entrant has crossed the finish line. Actually, the last arrival can be the winner.

This year's race includes 51 teams of two pilots each. Tori Gann will be flying the WMAA Cessna Skyhawk 172S with her copilot Oakley Clay, also a graduate of WMAA, who is an active, although not professional, pilot. "When Tori and Oakley approached us about this opportunity, we were thrilled to partner with them," says Pavey. "Our students learn to fly on the Cessna that has been generously donated to us by Delta Air Lines. They're very comfortable in this plane, and we're honored to have our school represented in this race." All of the expenses for the competition, including maintenance and fuel for the plane, are being donated by sponsors: West Michigan Aviation Academy Foundation, Mayway Flight Department, Michigan Business Aviation Foundation, and Tandy Champion (WMAA board member).

"A race like this, that recognizes and encourages pilots, inspires other young people to pursue aviation careers," notes Pavey. "The future of the aviation/aerospace industry hinges on having qualified talent, and WMAA is doing its share to cultivate that talent." The worldwide demand for new pilots will exceed 637,000 by 2036, with corresponding demand for certified aviation maintenance technicians.

(more)



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According to leading experts, the commercial pilot shortage in the United States will reach 15,000 by 2026. These shortages will impact the U.S. economy unless more young people are inspired to pursue careers in aviation/aerospace. "We project that by the end of this school year, we will graduate 81 students with a private pilot license since our founding in 2010," continues Pavey. "We have also launched hundreds of students into careers in STEM (sciences, technology, engineering and math). Our students are excited about the opportunity to pursue high-growth career opportunities beginning in high school."

If you want to follow along and see how Team WMAA is doing, visit www.airraceclassic.org for daily updates. You can also track them in flight using a site such as www.flightradar24.com. Just search their tail number, N915DD.

About West Michigan Aviation Academy: WMAA is a tuition-free public charter high school located on the campus of the Gerald R. Ford International Airport. WMAA is the only high school in the nation where a student can earn a private pilot license as part of the high school curriculum. With a curriculum rich in aviation, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math), and robotics, WMAA provides a unique educational opportunity for students to focus specifically on high-growth employment fields during their high school education. This better equips them to pursue higher education or technical degrees, and find employment in their chosen field. Learn more at www.westmichiganaviation.org.

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