



WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

For Immediate Release
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Grand Rapids, MI – June 14, 2019: West Michigan Aviation Academy (WMAA) is pleased to introduce a compelling new class for the Fall 2019 semester, *Build a Plane*, made possible in part by a generous gift from the Michigan Business Aviation Foundation.

Starting in the fall of 2019, approximately 40 students will begin building a Carbon Cub EX2. The plane has roughly 8,000 parts and requires 800-1,000 hours to build over two years. "This project will give students a unique experience," says Brian Jensen, WMAA faculty member. "Students build prototypes and models in other classes, but this will be a functional product built solely by them. In the process, they're going to learn about logistics and supply chains. They're going to focus on engineering requirements and quality control, and learn strict adherence to technical data. They're going to build a plane the same way that most aircraft builders do it."

This class is yet another step in WMAA's journey to address the aviation talent shortfall. West Michigan is home to many engineering, computer science, robotics and aviation corporations. These companies need and want local talent to fill their employment pipeline. All of them are facing shortages. According to leading experts, the commercial pilot shortage in the United States will reach 15,000 by 2026. Similarly, aerospace companies are experiencing a shortage in skilled trade positions and engineering.

The Michigan Business Aviation Foundation (MBAF) got involved in this project because they see firsthand the extreme talent shortage in the industry. "We have been working on the problem at the collegiate level," says John McAlindon of MBAF. "But after I visited WMAA, the passion and energy of the kids was contagious. I called some of my colleagues and threw out the idea of helping to fund this airplane build. We all thought it made sense for our Foundation to step up to this work, so we made it happen." MBAF announced their \$25,000 gift at the annual WMAA Gala on May 16, where it was matched 2:1 by WMAA founder Dick DeVos. Together, these two gifts will fund the first year of the Build a Plane class.

MBAF wants to encourage participation in all aviation careers. "Not all students have the ability or interest to become a pilot," says Rick Fiddler, who serves on both the WMAA and MBAF boards. "We need mechanics, engineers, flight crews, airplane designers and more. We hope this build project attracts students to a broader range of aviation opportunities."

Real-life responsibility is part of the lure. "These students are building a real airplane together, notes Jay Orwin, also of MBAF. "It's almost unheard-of to have that level of responsibility at the high school level. I can't imagine the pride of ownership those kids will feel when that plane takes off!"

(more)



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The MBAF also hopes this project and collaboration help more students become aware of opportunities within business aviation. “Business aviation is a whole different ballgame than commercial aviation,” McAlindon notes. “There are companies focused specifically on business jet design who need engineers and designers. Businesses all over the globe have their own aviation departments. They need pilots, flight crews and mechanics. Because there’s such a shortage, qualified applicants are in high demand. We’re working to make sure students know that there are great career opportunities for them on the business side.”

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 in Grand Rapids, MI. 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.

About Michigan Business Aviation Foundation: MBAF is a Michigan-based non-profit focused on the advancement of business aviation. It was founded in 1998 to represent companies and individuals active in general aviation in Michigan and to promote business aviation as a career option to collegiate and high school students. To learn more, visit www.mibaa.org.

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