

# HORIZONS

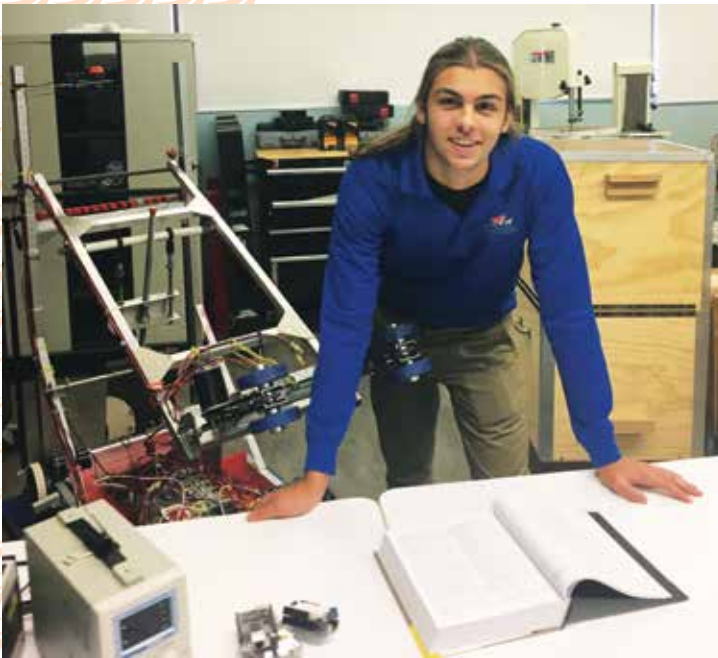
Views and Perspectives from  
WEST MICHIGAN  
AVIATION ACADEMY

Fall 2018

## Meet WMAA'S Renaissance Man!

You might have heard that term applied to Leonardo da Vinci. Now we are pleased to introduce you to our own renaissance man, senior Jaden Gani.

A renaissance man is a person whose expertise spans a significant number of various subject areas. Check! Sit and talk with Jaden for a few minutes, and you'll be amazed by his wide-ranging interests. He likes to cook, especially Korean food. He's handy with a pair of knitting needles. He's a bit of an artist. He's into languages.



Jaden Gani never thought of going anywhere else!

Engineering, AP Computer Science, and now Autonomous Vehicles. I also love the fabrication lab, because I have unlimited access to all the tools and materials there."

For Jaden, WMAA was "love at first byte." "This is an unconventional place," he notes. "The teachers really encourage students to explore and try things. I never had thoughts of going anywhere else!"

And, perhaps most importantly for his career at WMAA, Jaden loves engineering. "I knew WMAA had a reputation for engineering, but I also had some friends who were attending," he admits. "I came for a few different reasons, but once I got into the engineering classes my freshman year, I was hooked."

Jaden loves to merge data and electronics to solve a practical need. For example, he's currently pondering how to use meteorological data so that he can electronically water the herbs in his garden. He's also the lead programmer on his robotics team, and a self-professed electronics hobbyist. "I tried to build an analog synthesizer, but I didn't know enough," he admits. "But the failure was good, because it drove me forward to learn more! Now I'm reading a book to get more of the theoretical knowledge."

Jaden can't get enough engineering. "I love all the choices here," he says enthusiastically. "We have so many engineering classes, and you can branch out into all kinds of different directions. I've explored Intro to Robotics, Digital

"I came for a few different reasons, but once I got into the engineering classes my freshman year, I was hooked." Jaden Gani



“Teachers thrive when you give them space and time to hone their craft, and expert teachers help mold excellent students.”

Chris Williams, Director of Teaching and Learning

## Becoming Master Educators

Who is typically trying to excel in school? Your first answer is probably, “students.” But at WMAA, our teachers strive for excellence as much as our students do. Now we’re investing time and resources to support that goal.

“Teachers thrive when you give them space and time to hone their craft,” says Chris Williams, Director of Teaching and Learning. “And expert teachers help mold excellent students.”

Expert education doesn’t happen by accident. It requires deliberate effort to carve out time and create opportunities for innovation. “Studies have shown that the most important factor influencing student success is collective teacher efficacy,” Chris notes. “It rates even higher than teacher-student relationships, home environment, or parental involvement. ‘Collective teacher efficacy’ is the staff’s belief that together they can inspire growth and change in their students. Our teachers and administration are working together to achieve this common goal.”

**What does this look like?** Teacher development includes things like mentors for new teachers, as well as one-on-one coaching and observation. It also includes several weeks of professional development time. That’s more than the typical high school teacher would receive. WMAA has also added two innovative efforts: Curriculum Camp and Teacher Leadership Academy.

Curriculum Camp brings teachers together one department at a time. They spend five days thinking about their vision for what they teach and how they are going to convey it. “We focused on engineering, math and science last year,” notes

Chris. “Now each of those teams is adapting their curriculum throughout the year to meet the expectations they all agreed upon.” Other departments are slated to engage in Curriculum Camp during the upcoming year.

The Teacher Leadership Academy is a less formal way for teachers to get together during the school year and talk. They met five times during the last school year, and plan to meet monthly this year. “It’s all voluntary,” says Carson Ratliff, an English teacher who helped bring this idea forward. “Our last session came at the end of the school year, and 24 of our 37 teachers attended! We have an excited, energetic and committed staff.”

The Classroom Fly By is a teacher-driven innovation that came out of the Leadership Academy. It provides opportunities for teachers to spend time in each other’s classrooms, observing and learning. “We have a poster that teachers can put in the classroom window. It’s sort of a ‘we’re open’ sign that invites other teachers to stroll in and observe,” Carson explains. Teachers are using their free hour to visit other classrooms and learn. “Our staff appreciates the opportunity to observe peers in action. However, this practice is also having a big impact on students,” confirms Chris. “Students see teachers trying to learn, and that really changes the dynamic between them.” This kind of sharing helps teachers learn new techniques. It also surfaces opportunities for cross-disciplinary projects.

“Not many schools invest in a full-time person for teacher development, and not all teachers embrace the idea of collaborative learning,” Chris observes. “But WMAA’s culture is different. Here, the commitment to excellence runs through students, teachers and staff alike. Our teachers are driving this work forward.”

## Come See What Your Support Can Do!

Want to learn more about how your support can help our students?

Join us for a Soaring Together tour. Please contact Kelsea Wierenga at least one week in advance to reserve your spot. All tours begin at 8:30am and last for one hour.

### Upcoming Tour Dates

**October 23**

**January 29**

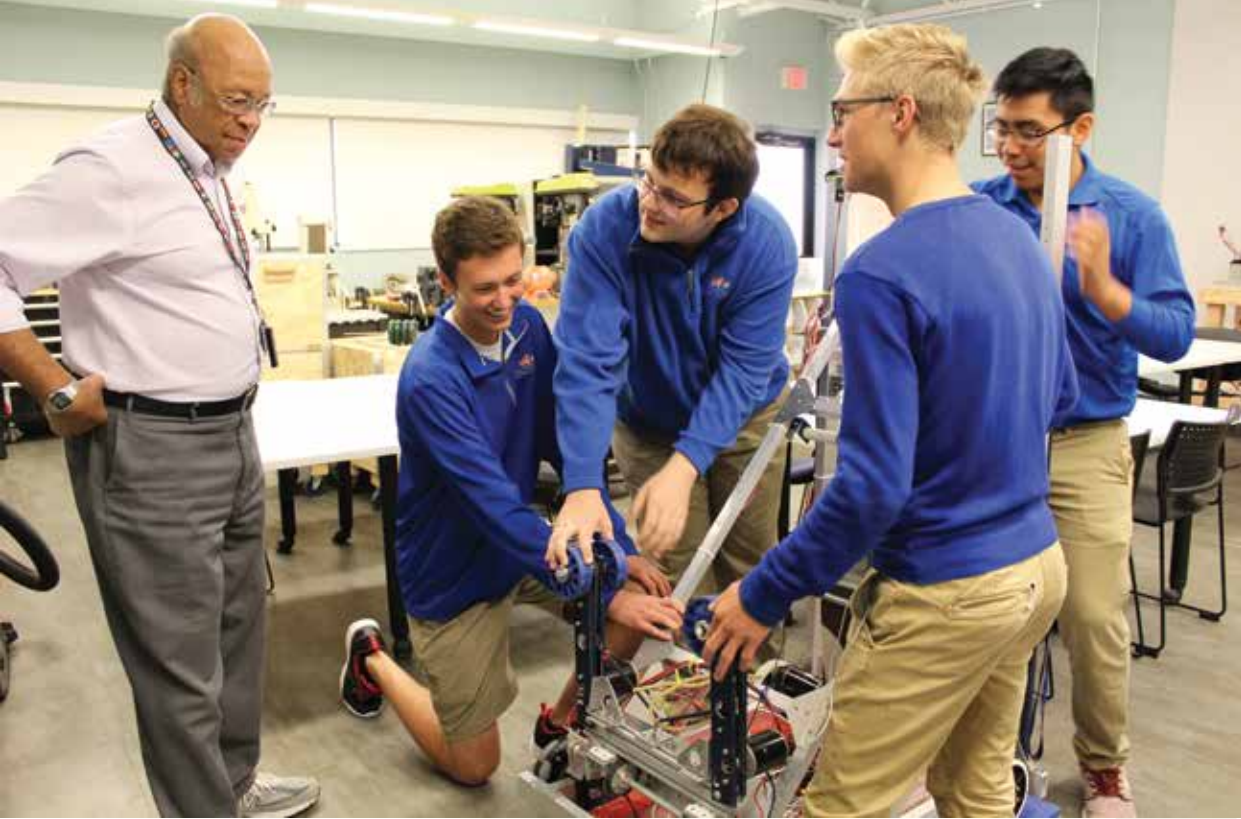
**February 5 & 26**

**March 7**

**April 9 & 30**



WEST MICHIGAN  
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Mentors like Larry Wilcox, who can offer real-world experience, provide invaluable assistance to our students.

## Real World Expertise? Priceless.

Part of our purpose here at WMAA is to help students explore real world, high-demand career opportunities through class work as well as extracurricular projects. GE Aviation is a significant and deeply committed partner in this effort.

WMAA has impressive bench strength in engineering and robotics. “Ron Baum, a retired teacher, jump-started our program,” recalls engineering teacher Peter VandenBerg. “He designed a one-year course for sophomores that would give a comprehensive overview of engineering, technology and robotics. He focused specifically on hands-on activities and career exposure. His goal was to show students a broad perspective, and help them understand an education path to jobs that interested them.”

Ron invited GE Aviation to partner with WMAA. George Kiefer, then the General Manager of Avionics for North America, responded enthusiastically to his approach. Now in its seventh year, the partnership has grown tremendously. “GE Aviation is a true partner,” Peter notes. “In addition to their generous financial support, they bring real world experience to our students. They mentor our robotics teams. They share knowledge through speakers and field trips. We talk with them about curriculum options, and what students need to know when they graduate from high school. That expertise is priceless.”

One of GE Aviation’s most significant and ongoing gifts to WMAA students is their job shadow program. On most Fridays during the school year, one or two students head over to GE Aviation to job shadow for half a day. “Our students get so excited about this,” says Peter. “They see new things, and identify what they would like to learn more about. Sometimes they can narrow down their interest by ruling out some areas, which is also incredibly helpful.” GE Aviation generously offered more than 30 students the opportunity to engage in this program last year.

WMAA students benefit from GE Aviation’s consistent, in-depth support all year long. “I would estimate that GE Aviation invests 8-10 hours per week in our students,” Peter says. “That’s a huge commitment that we sincerely appreciate and value.”

**What’s in it for GE Aviation? In a word: community.** “We see education support as a great way to give back to the community,” says Larry Wilcox, Advanced Lead Engineer—Electronic Hardware, who coordinates the Friday visits. “Our people enjoy working with the students. This partnership is a valuable and significant way to share our resources and get students excited about engineering.”

We sincerely thank GE Aviation for their investment in and commitment to WMAA!

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Peter VandenBerg, engineering teacher





WEST MICHIGAN  
AVIATION ACADEMY

Development Office  
5363 44th St SE  
Grand Rapids MI 49512

## Soaring Together

This school creates amazing and unparalleled opportunities for students. The per-pupil allotment we receive from the State as a charter school is not nearly enough to cover the true cost of our programs. Donors like you make it possible to provide the exposure and experiences that produce thriving, well-prepared high school graduates each year. We invite you to get on board with us by committing to an annual gift. Learn more by contacting us, or check out the Development Office online.

### Community Partners

Biggby Coffee (2700 Kraft Avenue)  
Foremost Graphics Group (2921 Wilson Drive NW)  
Marco New American Bistro (884 Forest Hill Avenue SE)

### Development Office Contact Information

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## Thank You!

The Development Office engages people in the mission and vision of West Michigan Aviation Academy through financial support. We offer several opportunities each year for new and existing donors to receive updates and make a financial commitment. Thanks to everyone who attended our Broadening Horizons Breakfast on September 20, especially the table hosts and the new donors. Please contact Meggan George if you would like to play a role in next year's event.

## Big News coming in February!

**We have officially formed a Foundation...stay tuned for more information about our board leadership team and the exciting things we will be doing for WMAA!**