

# HORIZONS

## Views and Perspectives from WEST MICHIGAN AVIATION ACADEMY

Fall 2019

### It Works! One of WMAA's First Graduates Is Now a Pilot

Joshua Nienhaus will tell you he was a pretty typical 14-year-old when it came to education. "I wasn't totally excited about high school," he confesses. "I didn't know what I wanted to be or do. Since I'm a forward-thinking planner, the not knowing drove me crazy."

Then he saw the announcement about a new school, West Michigan Aviation Academy. "That struck a chord in me," Joshua recalls. "I've always been interested in aviation. For me, the best part of any family trip was the airplane ride!"

Joshua joined WMAA as a freshman in the first class of 2010/2011, and he decided to earn a private pilot license. "Mr. Pavey was a mentor to me," he says. "As I got closer to graduation in 2014, the school brought in different college representatives for meetings. Western Michigan University really stood out. So I applied, was accepted, and earned my Aviation Flight Science degree."

While at WMU, Joshua also earned a coveted spot on the Sky Broncos flight team. "They presented to us while I was at WMAA, and I had this drive to be the captain. My senior year at WMU, that dream came true!"

Josh completed his first flight as a full-fledged commercial pilot on September 4!

Becoming a commercial pilot is a bit like becoming a physician. You need a lot of education and a lot of experience before a company will put you up in the air. "I earned my commercial rating in my sophomore year at WMU, which meant I could fly for hire," Joshua says. "From there, I needed 1,000 hours of flight time to qualify for airline work." Although he graduated in 2018 from WMU, he kept logging hours doing aerial survey work.

Fortunately for Joshua, the pilot shortage means that airlines are very interested in qualified prospects. When he was a college sophomore, he met with a recruiter from Republic Airlines and learned about their cadet program. "I got a conditional job offer after that meeting," Joshua remembers. "As soon as I logged 1,000 of flight time, I sent a note to my recruiter. I got into a Republic training class on April 16 of this year."

And finally...the long-awaited day has arrived. "Almost ten years after starting high school, I have finished my training, and I am now a certified airline pilot!" Joshua says proudly. "There's nothing like being at the controls of an aircraft full of passengers!"

According to Joshua, WMAA is an incredible place. "Finding your calling early on is awesome," he says. "I was able to pursue a direct path to a career because of the exposure and skills I gained at WMAA. I want every single student to have that same thrill of finding their passion and really digging into it."





# Ten Years Later, the Dream is a Compelling Reality



## What were you doing in 2010?

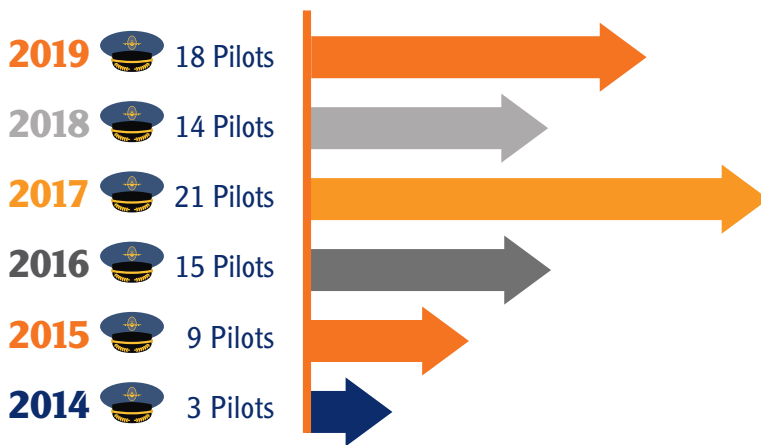
It's hard to remember, especially if the changes you've made are now so routine you forget that life ever looked any different.

That's how we feel about West Michigan Aviation Academy. Today, we're anchored on the airport campus, integrated with the business community, and connected to the students in ways we could only vaguely imagine 10 years ago.

## From when we started in 2010...

With unerring business savvy, Dick DeVos identified the aviation industry talent shortage and envisioned a high school on the campus of Gerald R. Ford International Airport that would bring students into the pipeline. He launched this school with 73 students, a small repurposed building, and a compelling vision. He brought Pat Cwayna in as a dynamic leader, empowering him to create a culture of innovation and respect that resonated powerfully with staff, students and families. He engaged a board that would provide expertise, community connections and leadership. He challenged the students, and then stepped back to see what they could do.

## 81 Graduates Have Earned a Private Pilot License



## WMAA's 10 Years of Soaring





WEST MICHIGAN  
**AVIATION ACADEMY**  
 Built to Lead. Engineered to Soar.

**...to today's stunning reality**

Today, WMAA is a well-respected, highly sought-after high school with more applications than the 620 available spaces every year. We have fulfilled Dick's dream of igniting passion for aviation in students, graduating 81 students with a private pilot license and countless more with interest in aviation design, maintenance and operations. We have broadened our scope to the STEM fields, all of which also present rapid growth and career opportunities. Our students embrace the culture, thrive on the challenges, and develop skills that lead to careers. We have stayed true to our value of inclusiveness, welcoming students who represent all corners of the globe and every imaginable background. And now we have transitioned to our next decade of leadership with Nicole Gasper. Her experience and capabilities will carry on the vision that the community has so obviously embraced.

This school has energized a powerful drive for excellence in many people, who together have brought the dream to reality.

**Thank you** to the donors and corporate partners who invest the time and money needed to create world-class aviation and STEM opportunities. These programs, classes, mentorships, internships, job shadows and resources inspire career dreams in all of our students.

**Thank you** to our staff, which demonstrates a commitment to excellence and to the welfare of each student.

**Thank you** to the WMAA Board, and now the WMAA Foundation Board, whose members volunteer their time and skills to guide and resource this school's unique mission.

**Thank you** to the students, who daily prove that they can be — and want to be — entrusted with a high standard of behavior and learning.



Nicole Gasper joined WMAA as Chief Executive Officer on July 1, 2019. She reflects on the past as well as on her vision for the future.

**Appreciation & Acceleration**

*"I deeply appreciate and embrace the excellent foundation that has been built at WMAA. The culture of being ladies and gentlemen sets us apart and equips our students with priceless life skills. We set high expectations, and our students have proven that they can rise to them. We also have an amazing staff. It is my job to make sure our entire staff is anchored to our mission and vision, and understands their role in fulfilling the promises we make to our students and their families."*

*"I want to sustain what is already excellent, while continuing to innovate for the future. I think it is imperative to create customized learning experiences for our students so they can explore their interests. Our strong STEM and aviation focus will continue to lead the way, but we can make those experiences richer through accredited online classes or opportunities to work with local businesses on real-world challenges. Ultimately, I envision a school where the boundaries between classes blur, as students integrate their studies in a practical, learning lab environment. It is our job to make learning real."*

sq. ft.  
 on, added  
 Pilot Flight  
 to curriculum;  
 t Charter High  
 n Michigan"



Robotics program quadruples; second plane gifted by Delta Air Lines



19 3D printers provided by Bosch; seven robotics teams; job shadow program with GE Aviation



90% of class accepted to higher education; 60th student soloed at summer glider camp; added biomedical engineering class



Implemented Teacher Leadership Academy and Curriculum Camp; formed Foundation



WEST MICHIGAN  
AVIATION ACADEMY  
FOUNDATION

5363 44th St SE  
Grand Rapids MI 49512

## WMAA Foundation Launched

It's official! The WMAA Foundation has received its paperwork and will now be the official recipient of donor gifts given to benefit West Michigan Aviation Academy.

**Why do we need a Foundation?** Two reasons. **First**, the State per-pupil allotment we receive as a charter school is not sufficient to provide the experiences and education we want our students to have. We need to raise money to fill the gap. An extremely qualified and capable board of directors leads our Foundation. These folks are responsible for cultivating donors and private philanthropy to fund the strategic priorities set by the school. They can focus their work on fundraising, not on governing the school...that's the WMAA board's job.

**Second**, donors who give to fill that gap would like to receive the appropriate tax credit for their gift, which happens when they give to a recognized 501(c)(3) organization. The school itself cannot receive such a designation, but a Foundation can.

So what changes for our donors? Not much! You're still investing in the same mission. Your transactions will just take place with the WMAA Foundation instead of the school.

Now that we're official, we've also created a website that tells the fundraising story. Take a peek at [wmaafoundation.org](http://wmaafoundation.org) to see who's who and what's what.

## Upcoming Tour Dates

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

**October 24, 2019**  
**November 21, 2019**

**January 30, 2020**  
**February 27, 2020**

### WMAA Foundation Contact Information

(616) 446-8886

[www.wmaafoundation.org](http://www.wmaafoundation.org)