

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from
WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

Summer 2019

This Young Man is Going Places

If you like to make predictions and write them down, this is one worth saving. Someday, you'll probably see Luke Koenigsnecht on the federal court bench or even in the Supreme Court! Luke has some fairly unique interests. He's probably one of the few young men you'll ever meet who started his 18th birthday celebration by registering to vote. He's passionate about politics and U.S. history, fascinated by engineering, and all in when it comes to liberal arts. He's also a self-described "Supreme Court nerd" whose hero is Antonin Scalia.

And he is a young man with a purpose. "I came to WMAA because I was looking for something different in high school," he recalls. "I thought aviation was cool, but it wasn't really my focus." He is, however, laser-focused on technology. "First, I want to get my electrical engineering degree," he says. "Then I want to go on to law school so that I can work in patent and intellectual property law." The market for attorneys may be saturated, but Luke points out with a wise grin, "There's a huge demand for patent law attorneys, and they must have an engineering background. It's a perfect fit."

Luke is a 2019 graduate. While on the hunt for college scholarships, he came across an unbelievable opportunity that he simply had to pursue. The U.S. Student Senate Youth Program brings 104 students (two from each state plus the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense) together each year to spend a week in Washington D.C. They also award each student a college scholarship. The competition is fierce. "Michigan delegates are typically chosen from the east side of the state," Luke notes. "I was honored to represent WMAA and West Michigan when I won!"

The students spent an inspiring week in March learning about national institutions, leadership and public service. Luke soaked it all up. "I believe public service is a calling," he says. "It's important to give back to your country. This week in D.C. cemented that for me. For perhaps the first time, I felt like I understood America as an idea, not just a place."

Luke is also the recipient of the 2019 Gulfstream scholarship for WMAA students. Gulfstream is a long-time partner of WMAA, providing this scholarship as well as other significant and ongoing support. Luke is the first recipient not specifically pursuing an aviation career. His essay, his interests and his skills compelled the awards committee to invest in his future.

"We are learning incredible life skills here," Luke notes. "We're learning to be ladies and gentlemen. We're learning to be polite and respectful. We need civility in politics, in business and in life. Education is great, but it doesn't mean anything if you don't have personal integrity to go with it."



Luke had the honor of introducing Ben Carson in Washington D.C.

Photos © 2019 by Jakub Mosur and Erin Lubin



We Don't Just Fly Them... We Now Build Them

What new class could possibly draw 60 interested WMAA students to an informational meeting? You guessed it...the Build A Plane project!

Starting in the fall of 2019, students will begin building a Carbon Cub EX2. The plane has roughly 8,000 parts and requires 800–1,000 hours to build. "This project will give students a unique experience," says Brian Jensen, one of our newest WMAA staff members. Brian spent six years in the Air Force, then another two years at Boeing building 787s, so he knows a few things about building planes. "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 project opens other new doors for our students. "A project of this size offers plenty of opportunities for co-teaching across disciplines," Brian says. "I can also see us forming new mentorship and job shadow opportunities with local companies. Students will gain real-world experience both in the classroom and out of it, which is a huge win for them."

We're also leveraging interest from local businesses and the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA). A dozen of our students joined Gordon Gilcrest in Sparta this spring for a Saturday of hands-on building. Gordon has won Excellence in Building awards at the annual EAA show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and he has offered to help our students with the project. "Parents want to get involved. We have people offering their time, in addition to tools and equipment that we need. This is a great project for engaging more people with WMAA," Brian notes.

So what happens to the plane when it's built? "We're still exploring options," says George Pavey, Dean of Aviation. "We may modify the kit to function as a tow plane for our glider program. It could be a great tool for marketing and promoting WMAA at various shows and events. We could also use it for incentive flights. How cool would it be for students to go up in a plane that their peers have built? Or we may decide to build it for a pre-selected buyer and sell it."

The only thing we know right now is that the plane will definitely be in the air. "We have to document everything for the FAA," Brian notes. "They function a lot like a home inspector. They determine what they need to see, and when they need to see it. They'll be looking at our quality documentation, at photos and at the plane itself. It won't go up in the air until the FAA says it's safe."



Scan the QR code or search YouTube for "Wing Build Weekend" to watch a time-lapse video of our students building a plane in Sparta.



Students whet their appetite for plane building with Gordon Gilcrest in Sparta.

Our Gala netted \$75,000 towards this project, thanks to a \$25,000 gift from the Michigan Business Aviation Foundation and a 2:1 match by Dick & Betsy DeVos!

If you're excited about this project and want to get involved, please contact Megan George, Director of Development, at (616) 446-8886 x 112.



Facts About Our Student Body

- Previously attended school in 23 districts (see map)
- 43 percent come from public school districts, 42 percent from charter schools, 10 percent from private schools and 5 percent from home school environments
- 31 countries and 15 native languages other than English
- 15 students participate in weekend food program for low-income families
- 90 students take public transportation to/from school every day
- 78 students enrolled in 2018 summer school



School Districts Previously Attended by WMAA Students



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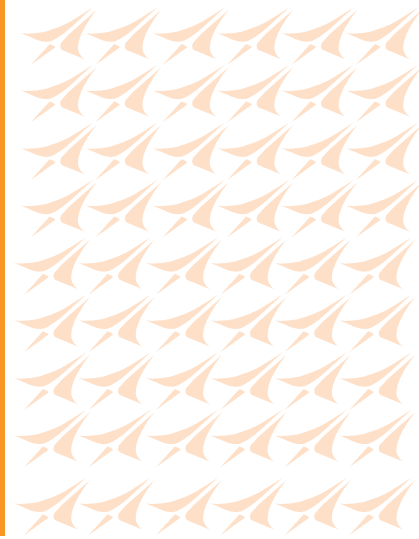
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and many others who have been part of the planning past and present.*



Chris Arnold took this beautiful shot of an Airbus helicopter atop the J.W. Marriott in Grand Rapids.



Two Professionals Who Have “Flown” Up to the Table

“When Dick DeVos invited me to visit WMAA, I thought I knew exactly what to expect,” confesses Chris Arnold, Regional Sales Manager for Airbus Helicopters Incorporated. “I’ve seen plenty of schools that promote their aviation acumen, and I was expecting more of the same. Wow, was I wrong! I was absolutely bowled over by what these students are doing and what the school is achieving.”

Chris did more than just ooh and ahh. He went straight from his meeting back to Airbus, looking for ways to get involved. “We don’t have enough young people entering the aviation industry,” Chris says. “The shortage is bad enough when you look at pilots. It’s even worse when you look at engineering overall. This is a huge problem, and the industry needs to figure it out. WMAA is taking concrete steps to make a difference, and I want to help.”

Kevin Nelson couldn’t agree more. He’s the owner of Nelson AeroDynamix, a local firm that helps clients purchase helicopters and then integrate them successfully into their business or personal lives. “Chris and I both want to be part of the solution for the challenges in aviation,” Kevin notes. “We want to lead within our industry to promote professionalism, safety, and doing it right.”

Both Chris and Kevin have stepped (or “flown”) up to the table, leading by example and giving of themselves to help

advance the future of aviation education. Kevin has been connected to WMAA from the beginning. He taught Dick DeVos to fly helicopters, and still manages Dick’s helicopter operations. Kevin has unselfishly shared his time and insights with WMAA students ever since the school started. “Dick is very generous with the helicopter,” says Kevin. “He puts it up for the silent auction at WMAA’s annual Gala, and he also donates flight time for teacher retreats and new family picnics. I’ve met a lot of the students and staff when I fly for these events, and they always impress me. I’m an aviation entrepreneur and someone who loves teaching. I can’t help but be excited by what WMAA is doing. I see the educational and the entrepreneurial opportunities in it.”

Chris’ efforts to get Airbus involved are paying off. He went through the channels and connected to the Airbus Foundation, which promotes resources to address aviation shortages. The Airbus Foundation sponsored a table at this year’s Gala so that senior company leadership could get an in-depth look at what WMAA is doing. “I’m thrilled that we sponsored a table, and now I want to do more,” says Chris. “I want to get youth excited about aviation and show them a career path. Our company needs good, well-trained people to hire as engineers and aircraft maintenance operators. What WMAA is doing is so important for the industry. I’m aiming for a much deeper, more significant relationship.”



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**

August 29
September 26
October 24



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.

Get Involved

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. One of those opportunities is our **Broadening Horizons Breakfast, which is scheduled for September 19** of this year. Please contact Meggan George if you would like to be a sponsor or a table host who connects new people to WMAA.

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