

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from WEST MICHIGAN AVIATION ACADEMY




Summer 2021



The Flight Training Center will be open for the Fall 2021 semester!

Gaining Altitude!

Almost 12 years after opening our doors, we've set our sights on a significant strategy to upgrade our campus and advance our mission. *Flight Plan* is a bold project that will help us graduate well-rounded, career-ready students. The WMAA Board approved this project in 2018 to accomplish three important objectives for our school:

-  **Expand** our flight training capacity with our own hangar, a third plane and classroom/lab space for aviation.
-  **Reconfigure** our existing building to make room for our popular and growing engineering course offerings.
-  **Provide** supportive resources related to aviation scholarships, teacher retention and student services.

Although fundraising is not yet complete, we chose to begin construction on the Flight Training Center this past winter in order to align with school and construction schedules.

Our new Flight Training Center is almost finished, and will be ready to serve students in the fall of 2021. This building, along with capital equipment investments, resources the aviation program to meet demand and preserves WMAA's inclusive approach to aviation. We'll communicate additional details as the project continues to move forward. If you would like to learn more, please contact Meggan George at (616) 446-8886 x1112.



We've come a long ways since the groundbreaking ceremony this past winter.



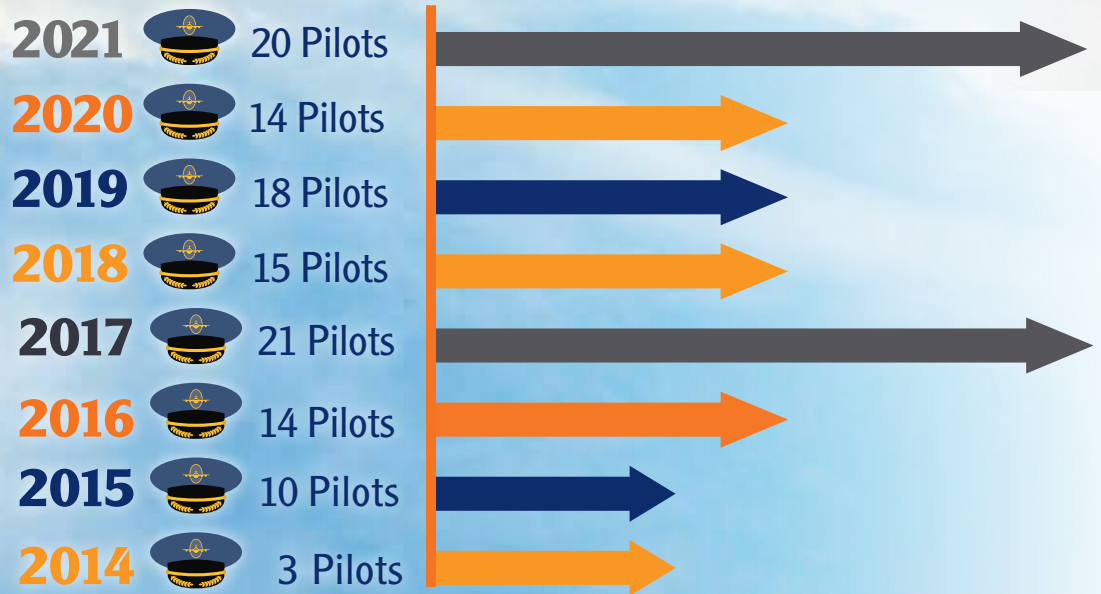
Celebrating an Aviation Milestone!

In 2014, we were excited to announce that the first three students had graduated from WMAA with a private pilot license. Seven years later, Aidan Nacke is the 100th student to accomplish this goal. "I didn't know that there were so many before me!" he admits. "I thought there had maybe been 50. I'm so happy to join this list. Where else could I get an opportunity like this?"

Aidan says big trucks and planes have always appealed to him. "My dad taught me to work on cars and motorcycles," he says. "I've always been drawn to big cool stuff!"

Aidan chose WMAA because of the aviation connection. "When I heard about this school, I knew it was what I wanted," he remembers. "All of my friends were going to standard high schools but I couldn't imagine four years at a school I didn't like. At first, I thought I might get a private pilot license just because I could. Who wouldn't want to fly an airplane for fun? But now I've decided that I want to make it a career." Aidan is planning to do two years at GRCC while working toward his instrument and commercial ratings at a local flight school. He says he may also explore getting a mechanic certification on the side.

We'll Crest the 100 Pilots Milestone This Year!



Tori Gann was the first female student to earn her private pilot license in 2015. She now flies for Northern Jet.



Aidan Nacke is the first student to pilot WMAA founder Dick DeVos in a school aircraft!

Filling the Talent Pipeline

People like Aidan are good news for the aviation industry. As we've said before, there is a worldwide shortage of pilots. According to leading experts, the commercial pilot shortage in the United States will reach 15,000 by 2026. But that's not the only part of the industry that's suffering a talent shortage. Aviation-related corporations of all kinds need and want talent to fill their employment pipeline.

Thanks to your support, WMAA students have virtually unmatched resources to explore the full spectrum of aviation-related opportunities, including:

- Two (soon to be three) Cessna 172 aircraft for flight training
- Redbird LD simulators
- Jaybird desktop flight simulator stations
- Opportunity to earn a private pilot license as part of the curriculum
- Scholarship opportunities for flight school
- A radio-controlled airplane club
- Build A Plane class, in which students are building a Carbon Cub EX2
- Courses and FAA certification for flying Unmanned Aerial Systems ("drones")
- More than 17 engineering courses, including Aviation Engineering
- Courses toward an A&P (airframe and powerplant) certification at Kent County Technical Center
- Mentoring from local industry experts and partnerships with industry leaders

WMAA also impacts the aviation industry by exposing students to career opportunities in design and engineering, maintenance, manufacturing, Unmanned Aerial Systems and more. Our students can explore the full breadth of aviation careers while in high school, so that they can pursue specific opportunities after they graduate.



Josh Nienhaus was the first student to earn his private pilot license in 2012. He now flies for Republic Airlines.






Introducing “Partners for Innovation”

Desmond Tutu is credited with the now-famous observation, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” He meant that things that appear overwhelming or impossible can be accomplished gradually, a little bit at a time. That’s true for challenges, but it’s also true for opportunities. We find it’s a very appropriate philosophy for philanthropy opportunities. Many people find that monthly giving, rather than a one-time gift, allows them to provide the significant level of support they would like to offer.

You can become a Partner for Innovation by committing an ongoing, monthly gift to the WMAA Foundation. This support provides steady and reliable income for the school. It also allows you to have a large impact over time.

The easiest way to join is to visit wmaafoundation.org/ donate and select “Monthly” under Donation Schedule.

-  Your gift is ongoing but you can change it at any time. Just contact the WMAA Foundation if you want to adjust your giving.
-  You will receive an email each time your credit card is processed.
-  We will send you a year-end giving summary for tax purposes.

It couldn’t be easier! You can budget a monthly amount that works for you. And your gift will make a direct impact on WMAA students. Thank you for your support!

*Your monthly gift adds up to
a lot of impact over time!*





A Living Legacy

Thank you, Larry and Marilee, for your dedication to WMAA and our students!



Donors can give of their time, talent, and/or treasure to advance an organization's mission. Larry Fisher, our retiring Dean of Student Life, is leaving a legacy that includes all of the above. Larry and Marilee Fisher shared a few parting reflections about the school, the students and the future.



You've been at WMAA since the beginning. How have you spent your time here?

One of my primary responsibilities is to recruit new students. It's easy to sell the school to prospective students and families because we have something good here! The other part of my job is to administer the school's code of conduct.

I was a little nervous when we started...would a school that focuses so much attention on building young men and women of character actually catch on? It has, and it's something special. My counseling background has helped me approach the work of instilling culture and discipline from a growth mindset rather than a punitive mindset. I encourage kids to grow towards the standards and elevate their skills in the process.

To Marilee's somewhat amused chagrin, I also took over coaching the track and cross-country teams seven years ago. She graciously assumed the role of "coaching widow," sacrificing endless evening and weekend hours so that I could help students develop their characters through running.

What are you most proud of as you look back on your WMAA career?

Our school culture of being ladies and gentlemen was a dream of the original staff. Now when we go out to community or sporting events, I often receive emails from coaches and organizations saying, "Your kids are great!" I'm proud of our students for buying into and living that culture every day, both inside and outside the school. I'm also proud of the investments we make in our kids. Yes, we hold them to higher standards, but we also provide every support needed to help them succeed. It's easy to come to work when that's the philosophy of the people above you.

What inspired your financial gifts to WMAA?

The students surprised me this year with the second-ever "jeans day" at WMAA. They all gave money to break the dress code, and told me I could pick the organization to which it would be donated. No doubt about it...I wanted those dollars to go to our campaign, specifically to the teacher retention portion of the project. Marilee and I are also in the process of setting up an annual award for a graduating senior and a faculty member. We don't know all the details yet, but we want to reward and recognize those who go the extra mile to create an inclusive, welcoming environment at WMAA.

Marilee, what do you think Larry's legacy will be?

Larry's work ethic is unmatched. He will help anyone, anytime. He's 1,000% dedicated to the school and the kids. Whenever he needs to be recharged, he goes out into the hall at the next break and talks to the kids. He always says, "Once I see the kids, I'm fine." I know he's going to miss those kids, and WMAA will miss him.

You Helped Us Reach Great Heights

The theme for this year's Gala was inspired by a quote from our founder, Dick DeVos. He is fond of saying, "The higher your altitude, the broader your horizon." We have tried to honor that philosophy from the very beginning, offering our students new experiences that make their world a bigger place.

Excited guests plugged in to our remote live event on May 13, connecting with each other as they congregated at virtual "tables." During the program, our speakers reminded us of how WMAA helps students reach higher:



By living our mission, vision and values in a challenging year, offering both a 100% virtual and a 100% in-person learning track to meet each student's needs.



Through a curriculum that continues to expand STEM opportunities for students, including courses such as Build A Plane and Biomedical Engineering.



With a culture that teaches students to be ladies and gentlemen while looking out for the needs of others, so that all feel welcome and included.

The Gala is our primary fundraising event each year. The monies raised help fill the gap between what is covered by the State's per-pupil allotment, and the real costs of providing the enriched educational opportunities that help our students thrive. Thank you, attendees and supporters!

We Met Our Match!

The Gala match this year was earmarked for our Build A Plane program, in which students are building a Carbon Cub EX2 plane that will be FAA-certified for flight. Donors made it possible to begin this extremely popular program, and now you are helping us to continue. Thank you for helping us reach our \$50,000 match goal!



Joan Secchia spoke with Dick DeVos about her late husband, Peter, and their reasons for supporting WMAA.



The more than 8,000 parts of our plane are starting to look like something!

"The runway behind you has very little value. It's what's in front of you that counts."

(Dick DeVos)

THANK YOU SPONSORS

For making our May 13 Gala a success!

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WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

FOUNDATION

5363 44th St SE
Grand Rapids MI 49512



Thank You

It hasn't been an easy year for students, staff or faculty. It hasn't been easy for many of you, either. But together, we have lifted up our students and successfully completed another year of powerful education that is shaping the leaders of tomorrow. We are profoundly grateful for the support we received from all of you, which allowed us to continue offering the breadth of programs and expanded services that make WMAA a unique educational opportunity.

Thank you for your commitment, your generosity, and your belief in the mission of this school! Please stay engaged with us via social media and our website. You won't want to miss any of the excitement that's coming next year!



wmaafoundation.org



fb.com/WestMIAviationAcademy

Interested in a Tour? See What Your Support Can Do!

Want to learn more about how your support can help our students? Join us for a virtual or individual in-person tour. Please contact Meggan George to talk about the best option for you.

WMAA Foundation Contact Information

Meggan George
Director of Development & Marketing
(616) 446-8886 x 1112
mgeorge@wmaafoundation.org