

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from
WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

Summer 2022

The Higher Your Altitude, the Broader Your Horizon

WMAA founder Dick DeVos uses this phrase often to explain why he started this school. Taylor Hall is a great example of what it means.

“When I started high school, I planned to be an engineer,” she notes. “But then I earned an incentive flight my freshman year. I had never been in a plane that small! The moment I took the controls during flight, I was hooked.” Taylor says she ate, breathed and slept aviation and planes during her senior year.

“I’ve always been career driven,” Taylor shares. “Once I realized an aviation career was attainable, I put 110% into it.”

That focus is essential for students who want to earn a private pilot license. “This program is built on knowledge,” she explains. “You don’t touch the airplane until your senior year. You spend a lot of time learning and preparing.”

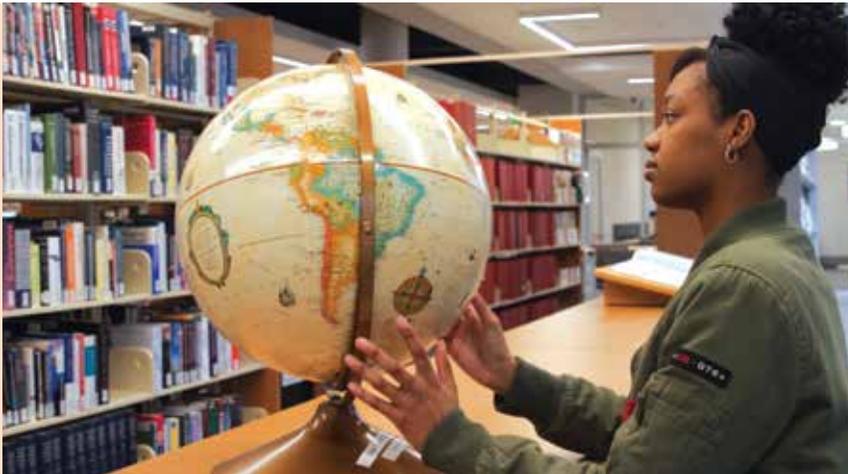
Taylor dreams of a business aviation career that will allow her to travel the world. She attends Northwestern Michigan College, and is working toward her commercial rating and being qualified as a flight instructor. “Mr. Pavey says that WMAA is a young adult program, and he’s right,” she observes. “Thanks to WMAA, I came into my college flight program with a professionalism that my fellow students didn’t possess.”

So how did a higher altitude broaden Taylor’s horizon? “When I came to high school, I wanted to be a fashion designer, or a model, or an engineer. You don’t see women pilots that often. I couldn’t fathom that aviation was a possibility. But once I discovered the opportunity, I grabbed it with both hands.”

Class of '20 graduate Taylor Hall plans to travel the world through an aviation career.



Hear more of Taylor's story through this brief video.



We love to hear how our alumni are using their WMAA education as a springboard into careers and life. Connect with us at wmaafoundation.org/alumni to reconnect and share.



What's Reality Really Like?

One of our goals at WMAA is to give students as much hands-on, real world experience as we possibly can. We invest significant funds, including donor dollars, in engineering electives. In turn, we want every class to deliver the maximum benefit. That's why we have engaged industry leaders in a STEM Advisory Committee.

"Our Advisory Committee includes mechanical and civil engineers, biomedical engineers, medical health professionals and university professors," notes Kaitlin Peterson, who leads the group. "They provide a valuable perspective on the skills needed to enter the workforce. We use those insights to strengthen and refine our curriculum."

The Advisory Committee has been in place for two years. In that time, they have already had a significant influence on STEM programs. "Businesses often use a system of 'toll gates', or decision points, to guide product development," Kaitlin shares. "The Committee is helping us design a toll gate simulation for our students. They also provide reviews during the semester-long senior capstone courses. This gives students real-world experience and also enriches the faculty's knowledge level."

A second significant benefit of the STEM Advisory Committee is the personal experience aspect. Our Committee members give presentations to share information about their fields. They also invest in individual students through job shadows and personal mentoring. This helps students see what the work is like, while building a professional network.

"We're voluntarily applying Career Technical Education (CTE) standards to our engineering program," Kaitlin says. "The state mandates them for our aviation program and we feel they add value. Our students gain tremendous skills that prepare them for further education and the workplace. This was only the second year of the program, and 40 of our seniors completed a capstone course. That's 25% of our graduating class. We're still ramping up, and I anticipate continued growth next year."



Engineering students shared their capstone projects with family, friends, staff and STEM Advisory Committee members during the May 17 Senior Engineering Showcase.

Calling All Alumni!



Like most high schools, WMAA recently completed its commencement exercises for the 2021–2022 school year. In our 12 years of existence, we have launched well over 1,000 WMAA graduates into careers all over the globe.

You often hear people say, “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” Our graduates have the best of both worlds. They’ve received tremendous educations and are well qualified to move along a career path. But they also have the opportunity to leverage connections with alumni and school partners...if they stay in touch.

Larry Fisher is a beloved figure for most of our alumni, having served at the school for 10 of its first 11 years. He is now the Vice President of the WMAA Foundation board, and is heading up our new Family and Alumni Engagement Committee. His goal? “Most people brag about their

college,” Larry notes. “I hope that our WMAA graduates brag about their high school!”

Graduates who stay in touch with WMAA will have a platform for both social and professional connections. They will also be able to support future generations of students who are seeking the same kind of career-focused education. We had two former students fly back for our Gala in May for exactly this reason. They realize that alumni relationships are part of the scaffolding for a successful career. They were investing in themselves as well as in current WMAA students through their support.

We invite alumni students and parents to spread the word and help us reach as many of those 1,000 graduates as possible. They will benefit, as will future generations of WMAA students.



Stay connected, Aviators, and you’ll be the first to know about alumni events and opportunities to engage with past and current students. Visit wmaafoundation.org/alumni and let us know how to stay in touch with you!

THANK YOU SPONSORS

For making our May 12 Gala a success!

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Gala Recap

The theme for this year's Gala, *Rising to Serve*, helped us showcase the myriad ways in which WMAA helps students elevate their skills to prepare for leadership in life and careers.

For the first time since 2019, we were able to come together in person! We welcomed almost 1,000 people back to the Amway Hangar at Gerald R. Ford International Airport for this evening of celebration and sharing. Among the evening's highlights:



Senior flight student Cooper Marcukaitis shared how he will *rise to serve* his country using the flight skills he has learned at WMAA.



WMAA Founder Dick DeVos highlighted the importance of giving students new experiences so they can *rise to serve* in a variety of careers.



Keynote speaker Vernice "FlyGirl" Armour reminded everyone that by overcoming the fear of failure, we can *rise to serve* those around us in life-changing ways.

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 Reached Our Goal!

The Gala match this year was earmarked for our annual operations. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation graciously offered a 2:1 match for all gifts proceeding from the Gala. We are pleased to announce that we met our fundraising goal for this event!

Thank you to everyone who made the evening such a resounding success.



RISING TO SERVE

We're Almost There!

If you've ever gone hiking on a steep hill or mountain, you know how exhilarating it is to stop and look back. While you catch your breath, you can savor the distance you've already covered before continuing to the summit.

We're at that point with the *Flight Plan* campaign. We started climbing this \$6.2 million fundraising mountain in 2018. After three years, a pandemic, and much hard work, the summit is in sight. We kicked off the completion phase of the campaign in November of last year, and we have only \$400,000 left to raise!

Please Help Us Accelerate to the Top

Thanks to the generosity of the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, we can double our rate of progress. They will match every dollar given to the Flight Plan campaign. So when our donors come through with just \$200,000... we're done!

We sincerely appreciate every gift, and are excited about completing the important strategic priorities made possible through this campaign.

Naming Opportunities Are Still Available

We welcome the chance to commemorate significant gifts through naming opportunities. How better to show your support for the opportunities that students gain at WMAA? We invite individuals, businesses, families or groups to give a gift that will be recognized in perpetuity. Please contact Meggan George, Director of Development & Marketing, to learn more.

You can make a gift using the enclosed envelope, or give securely online at wmaafoundation.org. Thank you for your support!



We started climbing this \$6.2 million fundraising mountain in 2018 and we're almost to the top!



What Does My Dollar Do?



How does the work of the Foundation impact students, staff, and future growth opportunities? WMAA CEO Nicole Gasper shares her thoughts.



How do you view the role of the Foundation?

I see it in two ways. First, it is an essential team of people that engages donors to support our mission through their giving. But I also see the Foundation as an organization that creates leverage opportunities. The dollars raised and the skills of this team help raise the bar in so many ways. We are more proficient with school communication, presentation and community engagement. This increases our ability to do what's best for our students.

How does the work of the Foundation support WMAA?

WMAA is in its second decade of serving students and families. The Foundation, through both its staff and financial support, has helped us gain clarity in communication. We have the tools to communicate our unique value proposition to prospective students/families, community partners, and educators around the world. These positive first impressions continue to open new doors of opportunity. They are also dedicated to the work of engaging donors. Our Gala and other events provide ways for donors to learn about and invest in WMAA's mission. That has expanded our educational capabilities.

How does philanthropy impact the way you serve students?

The money we receive from the State pays for traditional high school courses such as English, math and science. Philanthropy supports our comprehensive aviation program. It helps us fund elective courses in robotics and engineering. Philanthropy also provided the funding needed to build our new Flight Training Center. This world-class facility makes hands-on aviation instruction possible for a variety of students.

How does philanthropy impact the staff?

Studies have shown that the most important factor influencing student success is collective teacher efficacy. This is the staff's belief that together they can inspire growth and change in their students. It rates even higher than teacher-student relationships, home environment, or parental involvement. We are leveraging dollars raised by the Foundation's *Flight Plan* campaign to position WMAA as an employer of choice. That allows us to hire teachers whose approach aligns with our culture and expectations.



WEST MICHIGAN AVIATION ACADEMY

FOUNDATION

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Grand Rapids MI 49512



WMAA Foundation Board Updates

We are honored to have so many capable and committed people who volunteer their time on the WMAA Foundation board. We extend our special thanks to Lou Seno, who has served as the Foundation Board President since 2019. While his term as President has ended, his service on the Board continues as an Ex-Officio member.

At the May 2022 Annual Board meeting, Terry Russell, WMAA parent/ alumni parent and former Vice President of the Board, was elected to serve as the President of the Foundation Board. Our newest Board member, Larry Fisher, was elected to serve as Vice President. Their terms begin July 1, 2022.

Please join me in thanking these individuals for their leadership, and the entire Board for their service.

Connect With Us Online



wmaafoundation.org



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