

HORIZONS

Views and Perspectives from

WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

Summer 2023

We Don't Just Fly Them... We Build Them, Too!



Thanks to a gift from the Michigan Business Aviation Foundation and a matching gift from the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, students began building a Carbon Cub EX2 in the fall of 2019. The kit of 8,000 parts required 800–1,000 hours to build.

Our Build-a-Plane course has spanned four years as we navigated the pandemic of 2020 along with several new instructors. However, now the build process is nearly complete. So what happens next?

“We’re undergoing stringent final safety protocols,” says project manager Martin Grant. “We’re bringing in other professionals to check our work prior to having the FAA come in for the airworthiness evaluation. Then comes the biggest test of all: completing the necessary FAA requirements associated with functional test flights.”



Once those test flights are completed, WMAA can sell the airplane. That’s important, because the sale will generate the dollars needed to purchase another kit and start all over again. “Student interest continues to remain high, especially as we get close to the end of this first build,” says Clayton Melby, Build-a-Plane instructor. “We’re expecting the sale will provide enough revenue to cover a new kit, with enough left over for additional costs like tools, parts if needed, and painting.”



Build-a-Plane has been a wildly successful class, with more than 130 students participating in the build process over the last four years. Students have learned a tremendous amount, but perhaps the most valuable skill they’ve gained is the pursuit of excellence. “There’s only one right way to build a plane,” Clayton points out. “Students often want to flex their muscles and just start putting things together. We’re teaching them to slow down and pay attention to the details. If it’s not right, we take it apart and do it again. In aviation, you have to be a perfectionist. People’s lives are in our hands.”

Students love Build-a-Plane.
The sale of this plane will fund the next kit.

Meet Some Amazing Leaders

At WMAA, we intentionally instill a culture of self-discipline, leadership and courtesy. We offer a Leadership course that provides a combination of in-class activities, hands-on lessons, and authentic opportunities to engage in civic leadership outside of the classroom. In addition, we create opportunities for students to discover and develop their unique leadership strengths by being tour leaders, New Student Orientation Leaders, advisory board members, and much more.

It's so rewarding to see these young leaders spread their wings and influence people around them! Here's how three of our current students are living into their leadership potential.



Addie Turk
(Class of '23)

The Civil Air Patrol is a national program of volunteers who provide search and rescue support under the umbrella of the Air Force. Cadets earn certifications in skills to support search and rescue operations. Addie became a cadet as a freshman, but then the membership fell off after COVID. "I was the only one left standing, and I got pushed into a leadership position. It definitely got me out of my shell!"

It may have come as a surprise, but Addie has gained tremendous confidence in her skills through this experience. She's now a Chief in the Civil Air Patrol, passing on leadership skills while teaching 23 cadets from WMAA and other schools. Her unit recently took third place in the state Cadet Competition, which is particularly impressive given that none of the unit members had ever competed before.

Addie also channeled her significant skills into a competitive application process for the Air Force and Naval Academies. She applied to her District Congressperson and both State Senators, completing a challenging written application and a very formal interview in front of a military and civilian board. She did receive congressional nominations, and now is angling for a way to combine her passion for flying with a military career.

"I'm looking at my options right now, but I know I will choose something military and something with aviation."



Jack DeVries
(Class of '23)



Olivia Csom
(Class of '24)

Jack came to WMAA for the culture, and stayed for the academic rigor. He’s also taken on specific leadership opportunities for a deeply personal reason. You see, Jack was diagnosed with Type I diabetes at age seven. He received tremendous help and inspiration from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation in terms of how to manage his disease and live a full life. Jack has racked up more than 250 hours of volunteer service with JDRF during his WMAA career. Now he’s a regional youth ambassador who interacts with donors. He was also chosen to represent Michigan when JDRF went to Washington DC to lobby for an insulin bill. “Speaking as someone who has the disease, I was able to share how much this bill would help,” Jack notes. To his delight, the lobbying succeeded and the bill passed!

“I’m taking courses to help me understand the causal factors of juvenile diabetes.”

“I’ve taken every AP science course available at WMAA and I’m also taking a course through Davenport University. It’s good to challenge yourself in a field you are considering. If it’s tough and you still like it, that’s a good sign.”

Jack wants to be a physician so he can make an impact in the juvenile diabetes field. “We don’t fully know the triggers yet, but treatments are progressing rapidly. I hope to be part of the cure.”

Olivia transferred to WMAA this year as a junior because she wants to be a commercial pilot and travel as part of her career. She brought some incredible experience with her. “I served on Student Council and as a club leader at my previous high school,” Olivia says. “My school belonged to the Michigan Association for Student Councils and Honors Societies. I was privileged to serve as one of only 30 students on the Board of Delegates for that organization. I knew from personal experience how impactful membership could be.”

In her persistently determined way, she convinced WMAA to join MASC/MAHS. The organization hosts monthly events to encourage leadership growth in high school students. At the end of January, participating high schools make student council presentations, showcasing their ideas in a “Shark Tank” sort of environment. The top two vote-getting presentations for each region can go to the state competition.

Olivia encouraged WMAA students to compete in January, and one presentation qualified for state competition. In addition, she ran for the executive board, so next year she will represent the entire state instead of just southwest Michigan.

“This work has given me tremendous confidence in myself as a person and in my skills.”

“I never thought I could speak in front of 3,000 people...but I did it at states! I’m passionate about this opportunity and the way it can help WMAA students grow.”

WMAA Alumni Leading the Way

More than 1,000 WMAA graduates have spread throughout the country since 2010, pursuing careers and fulfilling the dreams they cultivated while at WMAA. Here are just a few examples of how our graduates are impacting their career fields and world.



Captain Tori Gann
(R, class of 2015)
and **First Officer Justin Teegardin**,
(L, class of 2016)

Location: Grand Rapids, MI

Occupation: Business Aviation Pilots

Career Highlight: "We recently copiloted the first ever all-WMAA commercial flight!"



Hope Johnson
(class of 2018)

Location: Fort Hood, TX

Occupation: Army pilot

Career Highlight:

"I earned my airplane instrument rating, and recently returned from a nine-month rotation flying with the 3/227th Assault Helicopter Battalion throughout Europe. My long-term goal is to be a

maintenance test pilot. My WMAA volunteer experiences are also helping me make a positive difference on base."



Ben Rich
(class of 2018)

Location: Waterford, MI

Occupation: Cargo Pilot

Career Highlight:

"Less than three years after graduating from Northwestern Michigan College, I earned my ATP license and 727 type rating. Not too many

people make the leap from a Cessna 172 to a 100,000 pound, 50-year-old jet. Now I've got my dream job flying 727s for a cargo airline."



Parker Tyson
(class of 2015)

Location: Palmdale, CA

Occupation:

Aeronautical Engineer

Career Highlight:

"I earned my bachelors in Aerospace Engineering and my masters in Mechanical Engineering

from Embry-Riddle, then went to work for Lockheed Martin. I'm working on guidance, navigation and control systems, designing software that connects the pilot's inputs to changes in the aircraft."

Tell your story and
reconnect at wmaafoundation.org/alumni.



Look at What You've Accomplished!



The WMAA Foundation raises money each year to help our school provide exciting, engaging experiences for students to elevate their career opportunities. Here are some of the ways your gifts were used during this past school year.



Aviation Course Support

Our comprehensive aviation program requires airplanes, maintenance, fuel, insurance, drones, tools, and much more. Many of these costs are funded through donor generosity.



Career Technical Education (CTE)

Some of our aviation courses are CTE certified. These courses integrate classroom instruction, laboratory learning, work-based learning and student leadership. To further benefit

students, we recruit highly qualified staff with professional experience and/or certification in the subject matter. Our CTE compensation must be competitive with the private sector.



Capstone Engineering Opportunities

We offer two capstone engineering courses, in which students choose a challenge, present their project proposal for funding, and work with mentors to build a prototype or conduct research.

They present their final project at our annual Engineering Showcase event. In one year, 40–50 students typically complete a capstone project using project dollars made possible through donor gifts.



Cutting-Edge Curriculum

We purchase university-level electronic curriculum for our aviation students.

“Choose Aerospace” puts students on a direct path to FAA mechanic certification.

“Unmanned Safety Institute” prepares

students for the Part 107 Drone Pilot Exam. “Bring Your A Game” teaches employability and work skills. More than 150 students took advantage of these courses this past year.



Air Zoo Visit

The Air Zoo is a world-class, Smithsonian-affiliated aerospace and science museum with over 100 air and space artifacts, inspiring interactive exhibits, full-motion flight simulators, and indoor amusement

park rides. Donor gifts allow us to take all 155 freshmen to the Air Zoo each year and ignite their aviation imaginations.



Community Engagement

Our Foundation staff works hard to cultivate a network of business and industry experts who help our students explore career opportunities by sharing work and life experiences. The

list includes notable organizations such as GE Aviation, Northern Jet, Amway, NASA, Sparta Airport, and many more. Many of these organizations also choose to offer internships/job shadows once they meet our incredible students and understand their skills. Our fundraising team generates tremendous return on investment!

12th Annual Leaders of Tomorrow Gala

Legendary Leadership



A Sold-Out Success

For the first time in our twelve-year event history, we welcomed a sold-out crowd to the Amway Hangar at Gerald R. Ford International Airport to celebrate WMAA students. Our theme of *Legendary Leadership* showcased the many ways in which current and alumni students are elevating their skills to prepare for leadership in life and careers.

Among the evening's highlights:

WMAA Founder Dick DeVos shared his delight and amazement over the way our school has exceeded his wildest dreams. His *legendary leadership* provided the impetus for WMAA, and now the board and staff continue to nourish and sustain that legacy.

Alumni student Ryan Minnick, winner of the 2022 Lou Seno Scholarship, explained that *legendary leadership* involves helping other students achieve their dreams. More than 25 alumni joined Ryan at this year's Gala.

Our three guest speakers — all Living Legends of Aviation — shared their perspectives on specific ways that WMAA students can leverage their high school experience to provide *legendary leadership* in all aspects of the aviation field.

The Foundation board president, **Terry Russell**, invited all attendees to provide *legendary leadership* through multi-year gift commitments.

A host of **WMAA students** practiced *legendary leadership* skills as they welcomed, interacted and engaged with guests learning about their experiences and achievements.

The Gala is our primary fundraising event every 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. (See page 5 for specific ways in which donor gifts are used.)

We Reached Our Goal!

The Gala match this year was earmarked for annual operations. The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation graciously offered a 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 a resounding success!



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12TH ANNUAL LEADERS OF TOMORROW GALA

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WEST MICHIGAN
AVIATION ACADEMY

FOUNDATION

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The *Flight Plan* Campaign is Complete!

The WMAA Foundation's role is to introduce donors to WMAA and encourage private philanthropy, raising the additional money needed to fund priorities set by the school.

Each year, the Foundation and the school agree on an amount that will be raised to support general operations. The successfully completed *Flight Plan* campaign raised funds that were over and above this annual commitment. Using those dollars, we built the Flight Training Center, increased our aviation and engineering footprint, and created programs to support students and staff.

Thank you to everyone who helped us reach this incredible milestone in support of WMAA students!



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