

# AVIONICS NEWS

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## Wings of Hope



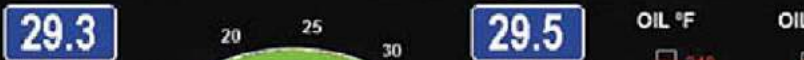
AEA Member Celebrates  
50 Years Spreading  
Peace Worldwide



### MEMBER MILESTONES

*AEA Members Toast  
Anniversaries at NBAA*

### The Top Avionics Sellers for 2011



# Wings of Hope Celebrates 50 Years Spreading Peace Worldwide

STORY BY CHRISTINE KNAUER

For 50 years, Wings of Hope has delivered help and hope to millions of people around the world. The largest and oldest aviation-based charity in the world works to bring peace to towns, villages and regions by meeting basic human needs and promoting self-sufficiency.

In the Amazon Rainforest, volunteers fly in medical supplies and construction materials, ferry sick and injured patients to clinics, and set up vaccine campaigns to save children from polio, measles and other preventable childhood diseases. In Zambia, Wings of Hope works with health officials to treat clubfoot and cleft palate. In other places, they teach better farming methods,

donate school supplies, repair windmills to enable clean drinking water, work to prevent HIV and malaria and much more.

Headquartered at the Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield, Mo., Wings of Hope helps more than one million people every year, an achievement that earned the organization the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize nomination.

“We generally use aircraft, typically a small bush airplane, to deliver aid because we serve the poorest of poor, often in remote areas accessible only by aircraft,” said Michele Rutledge, Wings of Hope vice president.

### The Beginning

Four card-playing friends started the organization in 1962, when they learned about a nurse who used her Piper Cub to deliver medicine and vaccinations to women and children in the Turkana desert. Harsh desert conditions took a toll on the aircraft’s fabric covering. Plus, hyenas and giraffes licked the plane night after night until it fell apart. The nurse was grounded.

During the next two years, the St. Louis businessmen refurbished an all-metal, single-engine Cessna, then gave it to the nurse, and Wings of Hope was formed. Today, the nonprofit organization relies on more than 3,000 volunteers, serving as pilots, doctors, nurses, teachers, administrators, mechanics and more.

“Fifty years ago, we were one base in one country – Kenya,” Rutledge said. “We are growing at about two to three bases a



*Masai tribespeople of Tanzania greet the Wings of Hope aircraft bringing vaccines and other medical supplies to their village.*



**WEBSITE:** www.wings-of-hope.org

**FOUNDED:** In 1962 by Paul Rodgers, Bill Edwards, Joseph Fabick and George Haddaway

**WHAT THEY DO:**

The humanitarian charity delivers self-sustaining food programs, medicine, vaccines, micro-loans, education, clean water and more.

**FACILITIES:** 155 bases in 46 countries

**PERSONNEL:** 3,000 volunteers around the world

**AEA MEMBER SINCE:** 2009



*A young patient and her aunt wait for ground ambulance transportation as part of Wings of Hope's Medical Relief and Air Transport program.*

year. The need is great for humanitarian aid. Today, we operate 155 bases in 46 countries around the world.”

Wings of Hope continues to be non-political and non-sectarian, not affiliated with any religion.

“Our only agenda is to serve the poor,” Rutledge said.

### **Spreading Wings**

In 2003, Wings of Hope drew on decades of experience to answer a plea from Missouri and Illinois leaders and established the St. Louis-based Medical Relief and Air Transport Program.

The organization’s Medical Relief and Air Transport Program operates North America’s only free air ambulance service, providing medical referrals, transportation and other services to those who aren’t able to or don’t have the means to fly by traditional aircraft. The service is available around the clock every day of the year.

“In our advanced country, there are people in rural areas liv-

ing on the margins of society who cannot take advantage of advanced medical treatment,” Rutledge said. “In larger cities, some people aren’t able to navigate the complex rules of Medicaid. The MAT program serves these people.”

Wings of Hope owns, operates and maintains the four aircraft used by the MAT service – a Cessna 206, Seneca II, Seneca III and a Chieftain. Licensed A&P mechanics volunteer to maintain the aircraft and perform repairs, maintenance and most installations in the organization’s hangar. The hangar includes space for a shop, parts storage, a triage area for patients awaiting transport and offices for the staff. Some 50 volunteers staff the hangar throughout the week.

“We transported nearly 700 patients last year, 85 percent of whom were profoundly disabled children,” Rutledge said.

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*Wings of Hope's base in Belize is now self-sufficient. A volunteer pilot and two A&Ps from the organization assist the Belizean base operators (pictured center, holding certificates) with their aircraft's annual inspection.*

## WINGS OF HOPE

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### Facing Challenges

In its five decades, Wings of Hope has faced challenges along the way, from establishing regional bases to raising funds and finding volunteers. The organization does not accept government monies, relying only on private donations. Typically, more than 90 percent of donations are used in aid programs.

“Our biggest challenge is the rising costs of avgas and other supplies,” Rutledge said. “We get a lot donated, and we are very grateful for all we are given, but our MAT program alone costs more than \$500,000 a year to run – and that’s with volunteer labor.”

In 2012, as Wings of Hope celebrates 50 years of helping the world’s poorest, most disadvantaged people in some of the most remote places on the planet, the focus remains on self-sufficiency. By providing people a way to feed, care for and educate themselves, Wings of Hope spreads the seeds of peace and goodwill.

“We don’t go into a region unless we’re invited,” Rutledge said. “We ask and listen to what the people want, then do it. We look to partner with as many people as we can but not duplicate services. The goal is to always have them in charge of any decision and to not impact their culture – unless they wish. Ultimately, the goal of any field base is to get to a point where Wings of Hope is not needed.”

To volunteer your time or make a donation to Wings of Hope, call 1-800-448-9487. □



*Achuar tribespeople look on as a Wings of Hope aircraft lands on a jungle airstrip in Ecuador.*