

## Spotlight: Young West County woman winging it for good

*From the Joe's St. Louis Spotlight on STL people, places and things series*

*By Joe Holleman St. Louis Post-Dispatch Jul 26, 2015*



Elsa Klarich seems to be in little danger of becoming an underachiever. “Growing up, I was told that I could do anything I set my mind to,” Klarich said. “And I believed that.”

Klarich, who turned 24 in April, has a bachelor’s degree in aeronautics. She is a licensed single-engine pilot with instrument rating and is close to securing her commercial license.

And she did not develop all these aviating skills just so she could see breathtaking sights, though she admits to being moved to tears by the beauty she has seen while flying.

She does it so she can continue — yes, continue — flying medical supply and rescue missions into the jungles of Tanzania for Flying Medical Service, a partner of Wings of Hope, a charity based at Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield.

Already, she has logged more than 430 hours flying a Cessna 206 for the service.

Last week, Klarich was back in St. Louis to visit family and to qualify for her commercial pilot’s license. “But the weather didn’t want to cooperate,” she said.

Klarich is the daughter of David and Cheryl Klarich. Her father, a lawyer, spent two terms in both the Missouri House and the Senate. She is the granddaughter of Jan Klarich, a Republican activist in St. Louis County. She, an older sister and three younger brothers grew up in the Ballwin area.

Her attraction to charity work emerged early. “I think I was 6 years old and I knew, I just knew, I wanted to help people,” she said.

While in her early teens, she went to Central America and Africa on humanitarian missions. Then sometime in her later teens, she decided she wanted to be a pilot, a goal she pursued at Liberty University in Virginia.

“The Blue Ridge Mountains are super-cool to fly over,” she noted.

Now, she is back in Arusha, Tanzania, where she shares her home with Malka, a full-grown German shepherd.

“My main job is to fly in vaccinations for children. Next would be setting up clinics for pregnant women,” she said. “I also do some medical evacuations, taking people to Nairobi for emergency procedures.”

Working mostly with the Masai, she has seen her share of dying babies and grieving parents, and she has a standard reaction to such tragedies.

"I cry," she said.

"And I hope I never stop doing that. Because if it doesn't bother you, maybe you need to check yourself. But then you focus on the babies who make it. When you've actually seen a life being saved, you remember that," Klarich said, adding that her faith helps her abide.

"It's a blessing from God. We get to start again, every day."