

# LIFT

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*Dear Wings of Hope Family,*

"Lean in." This phrase became popular in 2013 when a book bearing that title was released. Its author is Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg. At the time, the phrase was a rallying call for professional women to "lean in" to their profession and achieve their full potential.

Since that time, "lean in" has taken on a much broader meaning. It is often used to describe a person who is facing a challenge and chooses to confront it head on. In this issue of LIFT, you will read extraordinary stories of bravery by people who have chosen to lean in.

Joseph is the very first person to fly as a Medical Relief & Air Transport (MAT) patient in the Navajo that we recently added to our fleet. It was our first patient flight in this aircraft and Joseph's first flight in any aircraft.

In these pages, you will meet Leslie Cuppett and learn how she has leaned in to her service as a MAT pilot and hangar helper. You will read about how our Young Ambassadors re-engineered the Taste of Hope fundraising event to make it Covid-safe and super successful. You will meet Ethan Peterson, a former Soar into STEM student who, as a high school student, completed his first solo flight on his way to a career in aviation.

You also will meet our team leaning in to the challenge of redesigning our popular Soar into STEM curriculum. With Covid-19 preventing us from offering the program at Wings of Hope, this team is helping us rethink an approach that will ultimately reach a much broader audience.

You will be introduced to our newest board member, Justin Giessman, whose father, Butch, a longtime Wings of Hope supporter and board member, recently passed away. Justin is keeping his dad's legacy alive by leaning in to Wings of Hope.

Each day there are stories of courage taking place at our global field bases located in the most remote corners of the world. And, of course, there is you. Each of us have been called to lean in personally, professionally or both this year. You have continued leaning in to Wings of Hope with your support and encouragement that makes it possible to save and change lives each and every day.



Soar into STEM alum Ethan Peterson



*Changing & Saving Lives  
Through the Power of Aviation*

Thank you,

**Bret Heinrich,  
President & CEO**

# Event RECAP

## TASTE OF HOPE DRIVE-THRU EDITION EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS



Each year since the inaugural Taste of Hope in 2017, the Young Ambassadors' annual food fest has created more excitement, drawn bigger crowds and, most of all, generated more funds to support the global communities we serve. Like most everything in 2020, pulling off a successful Taste of Hope presented a particular challenge this year. Given the demands presented by adhering to health protocols, gathering size limits, and uncertainty about the likelihood that people would attend an event – no one would have faulted the Young Ambassadors for taking a pass this year. But as a credit to the group's creativity and energy, the Young Ambassadors redesigned what had been a gathering of 300 inside the Wings of Hope hangar into a caravan of cars winding through the Wings of Hope parking lot to say hello to volunteers, vendors and staff on their way to picking up gourmet carryout cuisine. DJ Carlos Suarez contributed to the festive vibe, as did a special Salsa dancing demonstration by Axa and partner Colleen.

Not only was Taste of Hope Drive-Thru a success but, much to everyone's surprise, the drive-thru version set a new fundraising record – raising more than \$30,000 through sponsorships and ticket sales. Earlier this year, the Young Ambassadors voted on where they would direct money raised by their fundraising efforts in 2020. Papua New Guinea and Colombia won the vote, so the bulk of the event's proceeds will support medical air transport and health care programs serving communities in these locations.

Wings of Hope owes a debt of gratitude to Dierbergs, Taste of Hope presenting sponsor for four years running, and the following sponsors: Joe-K Used Cars!, Air Choice One, Dassault Falcon Jet, F3, Phillips 66, Aero Charter, The Triangle Company, AVMATs, National Cart Company and Bott Radio Network. Big thanks also to participating restaurants: Thai 202, PM BBQ, Charlie Gitto's, The Donut Stop, Viviano's, Vito's, Jenny's Diner, Smoothie King, El Burro Loco and Mimi's Café.

## VOLUNTEER *Spotlight*

# LESLIE CUPPETT, MAT PILOT

Being Wings of Hope's only woman pilot seems notable – to just about everyone besides the pilot in question. After all, this isn't the first time Leslie Cuppett has been the only woman in the room.

She was the only woman in the aviation classes she took at Florida Institute of Technology where she graduated with a degree in Air Commerce Flight Technology. And she was one of the few women pilots flying for a regional carrier in northern Virginia in the 1980s and '90s.

So when did Leslie's love for flight begin?

"As long as I can remember, I always wanted to learn to fly. But as best I can pinpoint it, when I was little, my dad took me to the library and we got a kids' biography of Amelia Earhart. I also remember being less than 10 years old sitting on my parent's patio in a cardboard box with a magazine. I would peer over the cardboard box looking down at the ground below, and I always remember wanting to fly," Leslie recalled.

Leslie didn't just dream about flying; she made it happen.

"I worked all through high school saving my money, and people would ask, what are you saving your money for? Well, I was saving it to fly," Leslie said. "Between my junior and senior year in high school, I talked a friend into going out to the airport with me and I took one of the discovery flights for \$20 – and I signed up for flying lessons that afternoon."

Leslie grew up in Rockville, Maryland, and got her private pilot's license at Montgomery County Airpark in Gaithersburg, MD.

She left the cockpit for about 20 years to be a stay-at-home mom. When she got the urge to fly again, she joined Wings of Hope as a volunteer pilot for our Medical Relief & Air Transport (MAT) Program in 2014.

"Before returning to flying, I did a lot of volunteer work," she said. "So when I heard about Wings of Hope I felt that we were a perfect fit for each other. I could use both of my interests – volunteering and flying – in service to others."

When asked about her most memorable flight, Leslie doesn't skip a beat. She was one of the pilots who flew Emilee, a young woman with Wilson's disease, to the University of Michigan for experimental treatment of the rare condition.

"Her sister had quit her job to take care of her and her parents were paying out of pocket because insurance wouldn't cover her



Today, Leslie volunteers as a MAT pilot and hangar helper. (above)

In 2014, Leslie was on the flight crew that transported Emilee, a young woman with Wilson's disease, to the University of Michigan for experimental treatment. (left)



treatment. It was so rewarding to see how her family was so committed to her – and we could help her," Leslie said. "Then, lo and behold, the treatment worked. And a couple of years later, I heard she was the speaker at the Wings of Hope gala. That was just so amazing to be a part of that."

After about a year of flying for Wings of Hope, Leslie returned to work as a pilot for a regional airline in St. Louis in the fall of 2015. Fortunately for us, Leslie retired in October of last year and rejoined Wings of Hope in December 2019. Today, she is a MAT pilot – and she volunteers one day a week helping out in the hangar.

"I love just hanging out at the airport and being around the airplanes – and I love learning the mechanics behind everything," she said. "I wish I had gotten my A&P (Airframe and Powerplant mechanic's license) when I was young."

The only job around the hangar Leslie doesn't like?

"When we came back from the Covid shutdown, I did touch-up painting for two months straight which was very frustrating."

Painting aside, Leslie said she is "glad I found out about Wings of Hope and am able to spend my time serving here."

"I get to do what I like, which is flying, and the byproduct is I get to take people places and just make their lives easier."

## SOAR INTO STEM GOES VIRTUAL, WELCOMES NEW TEAM

Like most educational programs, Soar into STEM is going virtual for the winter 2020 session. Transforming our highly successful in-person curriculum to an equally robust and engaging virtual program that stays true to its goal of inspiring students to pursue STEM and aviation careers is a tall order – so we brought in some heavyweight talent.

Meghann Pytka is an instructional specialist whose immediate task will be redesigning Soar into STEM into a virtual program, allowing us to navigate Covid-19 health protocols while reaching a broader population of students. Meghann describes herself as a teacher who enjoys “working with students, making material interactive and problem solving. I also like getting to know people and their questions. I firmly believe in asking tough questions.”



Meghann Pytka



Charity James

Meghann grew up in Rhode Island and attended Colgate University where she developed a passion for travel and history. She spent a year at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, before pursuing her Ph.D. in history at Northwestern University. Meghann and her family recently moved to St. Louis, where she has quickly become a Cardinals fan. She currently works in course design, development and delivery for the McKelvey School of Engineering at Washington University. When not working, she can usually be found writing or spending time with her family.

Our new Soar into STEM Lead Teacher, Charity James, has been working and volunteering in the nonprofit world for the past decade. Prior to joining Wings of Hope, she taught elementary students in the Kirkwood School District. During weekend sessions, she also served as a training facilitator for the St. Louis Internship Program, where she taught professional skills to high school students to help them prepare for life after graduation. She is currently a graduate student at Webster University and will earn a Master of Arts in Nonprofit Leadership in December. When she is not working and studying, Charity enjoys binge watching shows on Netflix and eating chocolate chip cookies.

## DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT FOR SOAR INTO STEM ALUM

On August 31, Kirkwood High School junior, Ethan Peterson, made his first solo flight at Elite Aviation at Spirit of St. Louis Airport. Ethan's journey to earning his wings began last April, when he was one of 20 students to participate in the pilot session of Wings of Hope's Soar into STEM hands-on learning experience.

Ethan asked Wings of Hope President Bret Heinrich to write a letter recommending him for the competitive AOPA student flight training scholarship. And he was one of 80 students nationwide selected for the scholarship in 2020 which paid for him to take flight lessons at Elite Aviation at Spirit of St. Louis Airport.

When he found out he was awarded the scholarship, Ethan was quick to send Bret a thank you note that said, in part, “I don't think I would be nearly as interested in flight and aviation if it wasn't for the Wings of Hope programs ... You, and Wings of Hope, have made it possible for me to pursue my dreams, and not everyone gets to do that.”

Ethan wasn't always that interested in airplanes.

“In middle school, I was focused on space and rockets,” he said. “Only problem was that a lot of jobs involving satellites, rockets and stuff like that mean looking at a computer screen with a bunch of numbers on it.”

He was looking for something more hands on.

“Soar into STEM was very big for me because I learned a lot about all the aspects of aviation and, most importantly, it was very involved. If I want to learn about rockets, I have to read a textbook. But learning about planes meant doing maintenance on them, going up in the air traffic control tower and being in the cockpit. Even interacting with a small plane like a Cessna is infinitely more interesting than reading about the newest NASA mission. Without Soar into STEM, I don't think I would have had many opportunities to interact with aircraft.”

We are so proud of Ethan – and so happy that Soar into STEM is inspiring students like Ethan to take their passion for STEM and aviation to the next level.



## NEWEST BOARD MEMBER IS SECOND GENERATION TO SERVE WINGS OF HOPE

When Justin Giessman joined our board of directors in June, he continued a proud family tradition of supporting Wings of Hope. Justin's dad, A.C. "Butch" Giessman, who passed away in March, was a longtime Wings of Hope supporter and board member. Justin is president of AVMATS, the company his father founded, and brings with him extensive business and aviation expertise. We are excited about the energy and leadership Justin has already contributed to our board. Welcome!



## WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE 2021 GALA?

This past summer, the Wings of Hope Board of Directors formed an ad hoc development committee to tackle several important development-related projects, with a focus on how they might be impacted by Covid-19. Here is what has been decided regarding the annual gala:

### Will the gala still take place in February?

Through lots of research and connections with other nonprofits who have made successful transitions from in-person to virtual events, the committee determined that the risk of planning an in-person event for February 2021, as we've enjoyed in the past, simply isn't possible for safety reasons.

### Why make the decision to go virtual now? Can't we just wait to see what happens with Covid in 2021?

An event such as the gala takes at least six months to plan; therefore, a virtual event is being planned for early summer 2021. The financial risks associated with planning an in-person event – securing a venue, professional auctioneer, band, sponsorships, etc., with the looming possibility that the event may have to be cancelled – are too great for our organization to bear.

### What will this virtual event look like?

We are still working out the details, but the event will combine a video(s), silent auction, sponsorship opportunities, guest participation and "fund-a-need" into a highly produced and well-planned virtual gala.

As our committee finalizes the event details, including the date, we will communicate this on our website and social media channels. Stay tuned!



## OUR WORLD HAS CHANGED

Our need for your support is as strong as ever.

This has been a year like no other. Yet through all the challenges 2020 threw our way, Wings of Hope has proudly continued our mission: changing and saving lives through the power of aviation. We've all faced extraordinary change. But one thing has remained constant: our need for each other. And our need as an organization for your support.

Can we count on you again?

Please support Wings of Hope at [wingsofhope.org](http://wingsofhope.org)/ donate or by returning your gift in the enclosed envelope. Thank you!

## FALL AIRPLANE RAFFLE SELLS OUT IN 18 HOURS!

The streak continues! The Wings of Hope fall airplane raffle sold out all 5,000 tickets in 18 hours – and raised a whopping \$325,000. The winner of the 1969 Beechcraft Musketeer Super III will be announced after the ticket drawing on November 16. Enthusiasm for our twice-yearly raffle stayed strong, even amid the current pandemic. We are grateful for everyone who participated and looking forward to our spring raffle which is set for April 1.





## NAVAJO FLIGHT MARKS BEGINNING OF EXPANDED REACH FOR MAT PROGRAM

In late August, Wings of Hope officially extended our flight radius for the Medical Relief & Air Transport (MAT) Program from 600 to 900 miles from our St. Louis-area headquarters with the inaugural flight of our recently acquired Navajo. Our first passenger was 14-year-old Joseph from Tulsa, OK. Joseph was playing football last year when an unfortunate hit broke his leg. Most of the time, a break heals on its own and it's back to normal activities in a matter of weeks, especially for a healthy young athlete. But Joseph's leg healed poorly – so much so that he was having trouble walking. Local doctors had reached the limits of their expertise and Joseph's mom, Lisa, worried that without proper treatment her son might need knee and ankle replacements before he turned 30. As luck would have it, a pediatrician learned of Joseph's case and recommended mom and son see a specialist at Shriners Hospital for Children in St. Louis. Lisa and Joseph drove the seven-hour trek from Tulsa for the first time in January 2020. The day they returned from their trip, Lisa saw a doctor about pain in her knee and found out she had cancer. Treatment involved chemotherapy and surgery that left a rod in her right leg, making a repeat trip to Shriners by car almost impossible. Fortune struck again when Lisa learned about Wings of Hope.

"Wings of Hope came to our rescue. With both of us having mobility issues, it was a struggle," she said.

Since then, Wings of Hope has flown the duo four times roundtrip to Shriners. Joseph's leg is healing well and all signs point to a full recovery. After receiving a stem-cell transplant, Lisa's on the mend too. Both mother and son are grateful to Wings of Hope for making their journey to recovery a little easier.

"We're on the right track now, thanks to Wings of Hope helping us get back and forth," Lisa said.

## THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING WINGS OF HOPE

We are so grateful for the following funders who make it possible for us to continue changing and saving lives through the power of aviation.\*

Bernice Priger Charitable Foundation  
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\*Recognition of gifts made from 5/1/20 through 11/1/20.

## SUPPORT WINGS OF HOPE AS YOU SHOP!

As you are doing your holiday shopping, don't forget to choose Wings of Hope, Inc. on AmazonSmile. We raise hundreds of dollars every quarter simply because our supporters remember to make us their AmazonSmile charity. Thank you!

amazon smile



## GOLFERS TURN OUT TO SUPPORT WINGS OF HOPE!

In a year in which canceled events seem par for the course, we were thrilled that two golf tournaments benefiting Wings of Hope went off as planned. On September 20, golfers gathered at The Courses in Forest Park in St. Louis for the John "Mike" Cordell Children's Charity Golf Classic. The tournament honored the late Shriner who was beloved for his big heart and cheerful disposition as the driver of the red Shriner van providing Wings of Hope medical air transport patients ground transport to their appointments at Shriners Hospitals for Children-St. Louis. On September 23, the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Aviation Association Memorial Open took place at Old Hickory Golf Club in St. Peters, MO. The annual tournament was sponsored by the Greater St. Louis Business Aviation Association (GSLBAA), a longtime supporter of Wings of Hope which has made a tradition of splitting the tournament proceeds between Wings of Hope and the GSLBAA Educational Foundation. We are grateful to both organizations for teeing off to support Wings of Hope!

# Thank You

## FOR HONORING THE PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT WITH A WINGS OF HOPE TRIBUTE GIFT ...

Honorarium and memorial gifts are a wonderful way to celebrate and honor the people who are special in our lives. Wings of Hope is the humble recipient of hundreds of these tribute gifts annually. Those individuals who have included us in their estate plans are recognized in our Legacy Society. If you are interested in finding out how you can include Wings of Hope in your legacy and estate planning, please email Amy Buehler at amy.buehler@wingsofhope.ngo or call 636-537-1302.

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### **Want to learn more?**

Contact our Director of Development Amy Buehler at [amy.buehler@wingsofhope.ngo](mailto:amy.buehler@wingsofhope.ngo) or call 636-537-1302.

*Thank You!*