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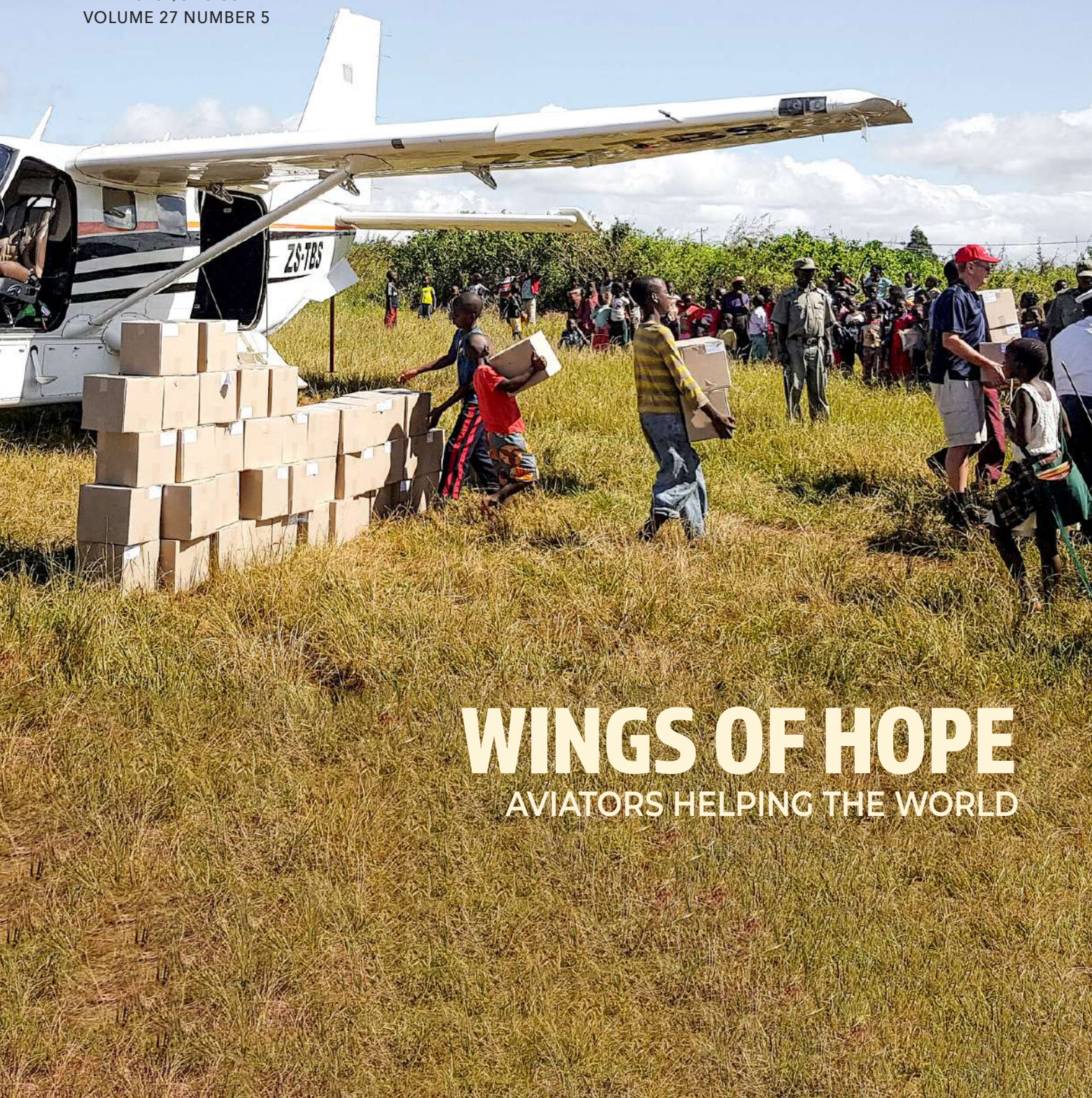
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WINGS OF HOPE

AVIATORS HELPING THE WORLD



Piper Seneca III in flight



GHN partner Flying Medical Services serves Maasai in Tanzania by providing preventative healthcare





WINGS OF HOPE

AVIATORS HELPING THE WORLD

by **Lance Phillips**



As with many stories in aviation, tales describing the roots of organizations can be some of the most compelling. Wings of Hope is one of those organizations whose history provides such a rich retelling it might almost seem fictional. The characters in this story include astronauts; mid-century, profit-seeking businesspeople; flying nuns; hyenas; Nairobi, Kenyan officials; and single-engine, solo pilots flying across the Atlantic.

Recently, I learned that Village Press, Twin & Turbine's publisher, is committed to supporting Wings of Hope, an international aviation charity. Naturally, I had to learn more and realized this story deserved special attention. After talking with two of Wings of Hope's leaders, it became apparent that its past wasn't the only story. The current mission and future goals are just as important.

In Plato's Socratic dialogue Republic, it was famously written, "Our need will be the real creator." This quote eventually became the English proverb, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Necessity was rampant in Kenya's Turkana in 1960. The Turkana Desert in northern Kenya experienced a drought that killed 80 percent of its livestock and most of its vegetation, only to wither under the subsequent pressure of sickening flooding.

Disaster in Africa Creates Needs

Nairobian officials were historically and naturally protective of their territory and culture. [As an aside: The East African Rift, often called the cradle of humanity, includes Kenya's Turkana. "Turkana Boy" is an ancient hominin skeleton unearthed in the region, and the tectonic activity that caused the East African Rift also has made an environment ideal for the proliferation of life. The persistent erosion of the cliffs of the Rift often contributes to further discoveries.] However, it had come time for the



capitol city's officials to approve foreign aid to help their country's inhabitants, who were severely affected by the extreme weather patterns. In 1961, The Medical Missionaries of Mary were ready to act, establishing their first relief camp in Lodwar, Kenya, 158 miles north of Kitale, where the main hospital is located. A trip that takes about 15 hours by off-road vehicle.

The following year, several things occurred during the timeline that greatly influenced the creation of Wings of Hope:

- Mike Stimac, teacher of science and aviation at St. Joseph's High School in Cleveland, Ohio, arrives at the Mang'u mission school in the foothills of the Aberdare Mountain Range in Kenya (~20 miles NE of Nairobi.) From Mang'u High School, he founded the Amateur Radio Club, Electronics Club, and Air Program. Compelled to bring every experience to his new students, he would establish a radio station, train students to apply for amateur radio licenses, rent airplanes from Safari Air at Wilson Airport, and teach them to fly. These programs are still active at Mang'u High School to this day.
- Bishop Joseph B. Houlihan, whose diocese covers the Turkana, appeals for assistance from Catholics in the United States. Pacific Northern Airline pilot, Jerry Fay, corresponds with Houlihan, and when the question of transportation difficulties arises, Houlihan points out how valuable a light plane will be.
- Jerry Fay organizes the Marian Medical Aircraft Fund to raise \$11,000 for a Piper Super Cub



Max Conrad receives a papal blessing in Rome



Sister Michael Therese Ryan pilots the Piper Super Cub



(PA-18-150), plus parts and high-frequency radio transmitters. He enlists the help of Pacific Northern Airlines pilot Bud Donovan. The purchase of the Piper Super Cub was transacted through B. J. Oswald of Oswald Flying Service in Tacoma, WA.

Initially, the Kenyan government couldn't understand the two men's motives. Jerry Fay said, "They thought we were going to start a flying service and make a killing [as a business]. Then Bishop Houlihan explained our purpose and that we'd help the natives who live so far from medical aid. Now they can't do enough for us."

Receiving the Pope's Blessing

Fay and Donovan soon left for Naples for an audience with Pope John XXIII in Rome before arriving in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the same time, U. S. Senators Warren G. Magnuson and Henry M. Jackson got the project to qualify under the foreign aid program, which meant the U.S. Navy and Air Force could help out, too. The Navy agreed to move the crated Piper to Naples, and then the Air Force carried the crate to Addis Ababa. This mission was officially called "Operation Handclasp."

After unexpected delays, Fay had to return to the U.S., meaning Donovan was left to take care of the aircraft alone. "[The Piper Cub] arrived in a big crate on Saturday," Donovan said. "I had to wait until Monday to get started on it. But I had it together by Wednesday night. Thursday, I took it

up for the first time – it felt good to be finally flying again."

Later, Donovan flew the little Piper about 700 miles to Nairobi. After some typical customs problems in Nairobi, he piloted it to Kitale, the town nearest the mission territory in the Turkana Desert. By the latter part of April 1963, Donovan was flying supplies into the mission stations and providing the priests and nuns as much information about the plane as possible. He accrued around 80 hours in three weeks. At the same time, Bishop Houlihan recruited Brother Mike Stimac to pilot the new Super Cub.

The Real Flying Nun

Stimac also trained two nuns to fly the plane. Sister Michael Therese Ryan completed her flying course in Boston. She passed her pilot exam on the first try, earning the distinction of becoming the first Catholic nun to do so. Sister Ryan (a.k.a. "The Flying Nun") would log over 40 solo hours before making her way to Kenya, where she would ferry supplies from the central hospital in Eldoret to three camps 800 miles apart. The sisters would fly missionary doctors, nurses, patients, medical supplies, and anything else needed. Soon they were dubbed "The Marianist Air Force,"

and stories about "the flying nuns" appeared in international newspapers.

Businessmen get Involved

Inspired by the story of tragedy in the desert, a group of St. Louis businessmen laid the foundation for the support of air mission service in Turkana. Joseph G. Fabick of the John Fabick Tractor Co. and William D. Edwards started the Turkana Desert Fund to raise money for a new, all-metal aircraft. The creation of this Fund is cited as the birth of what would eventually become Wings of Hope, which would officially be incorporated a few years later.

Since the Super Cub had arrived, it became apparent that the plane's fabric wings were not suited to the harsh desert environment of the Turkana. And oddly enough, Hyenas were fond of nibbling away at the wing's fabric material, attracted to the phenol in the covering.

Meanwhile, George E. Haddaway of Dallas, Texas, spearheaded a drive to supply the medical missionaries with a workhorse plane. Haddaway, an influential aviation publisher of Flight Magazine, was a director of the Turkana Desert Fund. He wrote, "In all my 30 years of aviation publishing, I've never found a greater need for an airplane."



Bill Edwards, Thomas Dwyer, and Joe Fabick receive the new Cessna



Max Conrad in Nairobi



Missionary Flight Training in Ohio

In 1965, Mike Stimac created UMATT (United Missionary Air Training and Transport), a flight training program in Dayton, Ohio, open to members of all faiths interested in becoming pilots and learning how small planes can be used more effectively in African missionary work.

Thomas Dwyer was the program director at the University of Dayton headquarters. The Turkana Desert Fund raised over \$30,000 to purchase a new Cessna U206 for the newly formed UMATT organization. The Cessna was larger, more powerful, and better suited to withstand the desert conditions in Kenya than the little Cub. Dwyer explained, "UMATT is a service for men of goodwill in all Faiths, working to help those whose lives and hopes will take on new dimensions because of the miracle of the airplane. It means fleetness to doctors to heal the pained; it guarantees transport of bread and milk to the hungry; it means dignity to the youth of emerging nations; and it gives strength to the energies of the dedicated missionaries and Peace Corps workers in the field. UMATT is efficiency, union, strength, and peace."



Navajo in front of WoH hangar

Long Distance Flying

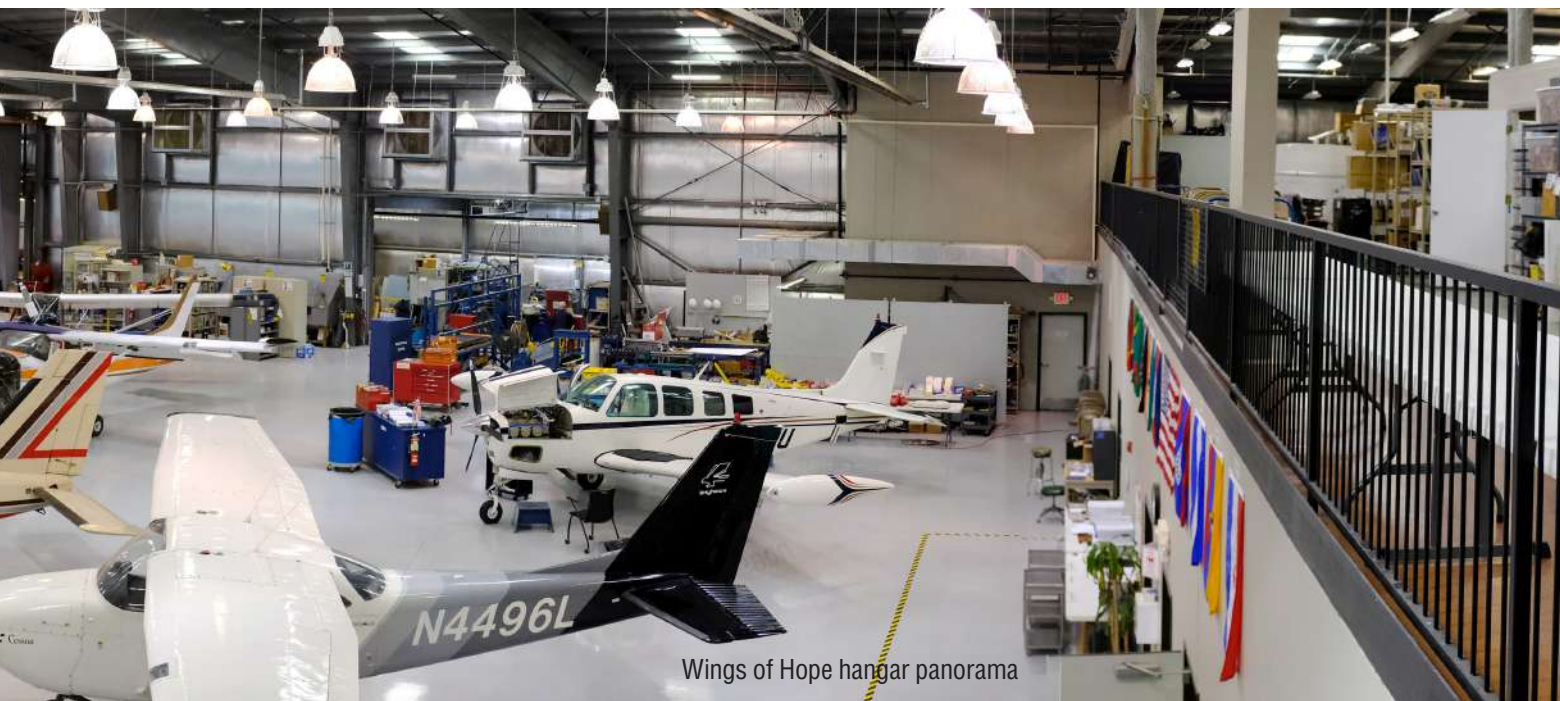
Max Conrad, a legendary pilot and holder of several long-distance flight records, flew the Cessna's ferry trip from St. Louis, Mo., to Nairobi, Kenya. The journey's itinerary was paired with press events and blessed by religious leaders of different faiths. The ferry began with a ceremony at the Ozark Airline Hangar at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport. Notable stops along the way included:

- UMATT headquarters at the University of Dayton
- Two days of public appearances and press in New York
- Medical Missionaries of Mary ceremony in Boston

- St. Patrick Missionary Society ceremony in Shannon, Ireland
- Papal blessing by Pope Paul VI in Rome
- Conrad's landing in Nairobi on June 10, 1965

Incorporation

Wings of Hope became incorporated in 1967 under the "General Not For Profit Corporation Law" of the State of Missouri, and its board of directors included Joseph G. Fabick, John C. Versnel, and William D. Edwards. According to the Wings of Hope articles of incorporation, "[we intend] to provide without charge, remuneration or profit, transportation and communication facilities for missionaries, medical missionaries,



Wings of Hope hangar panorama

teachers, and other religious, educational and medical workers, without distinction as to race or religion... to provide, maintain and operate an airplane service; to transport freight, passengers and baggage by aircraft ..."

An Astronaut Gives Encouragement

Two years later, director Bill Edwards received a letter from Neil Armstrong in response to Bill's letter of encouragement and support before the launch of the Apollo 11 mission on July 16, 1969. Armstrong wrote, "I certainly want to send my congratulations on your efforts on behalf of Wings of Hope. I am certain that this

valuable project is achieving brotherhood between nations in a way that cannot be accomplished by diplomacy or government aid programs. As an aviator, I sincerely salute this fine service as being one of the best achievements of the combination of general aircraft and dedicated individuals of good will."

Throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, Wings of Hope continued its work and was often recognized. The Associated Press wrote in 1973, "George E. Haddaway, editor and publisher of Flight magazine, Dallas, has been awarded the Federal Aviation Administration's highest honor, the gold medal for extraordinary service to aviation. The

FAA said Haddaway was cited for leadership in the encouragement of the growth of civil aviation. He helped establish Wings of Hope, a charitable organization providing aircraft and flight personnel for needy people in remote areas, and also was a founder of the Air Force auxiliary, the Civil Air Patrol."

Challenges

As Thomas Dwyer learned initially, the Cessna 206 was the aircraft of choice for their missions. However, by the early 1990s, the 206 had ceased production, and many of the incentives available for charitable donations were gone. Until then, the organization enjoyed multiple aircraft donations every month, but the flow of donations had slowed considerably. Tom Haines of AOPA Pilot wrote, "Many of the tax incentives are gone now, and because 206s are no longer in production, they are extremely valuable. As recently as 1987, people donated an average of two 206s a month to Wings of Hope. Since 1988, a total of three has been donated. To stay alive, the 30-year-old organization takes whatever airplanes it can get in donation and refurbishes them using its skilled volunteer workers. Those airplanes unsuitable for field work are sold and the proceeds used to buy 206s."



The MAT pilot corps



MAT pilots in flight

A New Millenium

Things changed in 2002. Wings of Hope had primarily conducted missions internationally, with a few supporting American Indians in the States. However, after a critical patient in Missouri suffering a severed leg from a boating accident needed emergency transport, Wings of Hope answered the call to assist. MAT was born. MAT, or Medical Relief & Air Transport, hangsars two donated Piper Seneca IIIs (N8456H, N8048Q) along with a 1975 Piper Navajo (N61490). Angela Walleman, MAT's director, says, "Along with Rashonda Clark, our flight operations manager, we manage 16 pilots and 8 medics, mostly retired doctors and registered nurses. In April 2023, we have 21 missions scheduled -- in addition to the 40 missions completed in the first quarter of 2023." She went on to describe the staff. "We have 18 staff members including two full-time A&P mechanics, one part-time A&P, and an avionics manager. With such a small staff, Wings of Hope relies heavily on our 260 volunteers. We simply could not operate without the help of these dedicated individuals." Walleman holds two master's degrees from Lindenwood University and is a veteran of nonprofit leadership and has been with Wings of Hope for 8 years.

MAT helps people all over the country get to places like Houston's MD Anderson cancer treatment center, Shriners in St. Louis for pediatric orthopedic care, and the Mayo Clinic

boprop, we would certainly expand our operations to open up the area west of the Rockies."

A Global Footprint

Tiffany Nelson, Wings of Hope Director of Programs and Evaluation, oversees the Global Humanitarian Network for the organization and its educational programming. She started 4 years ago as the Global Programs Manager and quickly ascended the ranks to her current position. Born in St. Louis, Nelson attended Mizzou and completed bachelor's degrees in business and Spanish.



Pilot, Fernando, waits for Alas de Socorro team in the Ecuadorian Amazon

in Rochester, MN for brain tumors and cancers. If someone needs transport, Wings of Hope is ready to help. Walleman explained, "We're not an air ambulance operation; we provide comfort care." MAT gets referrals from doctors and direct requests from patients. The only restriction is keeping their U.S. operations east of the Rockies. Walleman says, "If someone out there would like to donate a tur-

After working with the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic, training teachers and soliciting an aqueduct, she earned double master's degrees in Sustainable International Development and Women's Gender & Sexuality at The Heller School at Brandeis University in Boston.

The global network Nelson oversees is extensive and varied.

Wings of Hope's support in Africa includes the following:

- South Africa - Wings of Hope partners with Mercy Air South Africa, a nonprofit organization based in White River, South Africa. They provide aviation services to over 40,000 people annually, collaborating with humanitarian and mission organizations throughout southern Africa.
- Tanzania - For more than 20 years, Wings of Hope has partnered with Flying Medical Service (FMS), supplying planes, parts and yearly



inspections. Their flying medical clinics serve 25 Maasai settlements, visiting each village every other week.

- Zambia - Wings of Hope supports FlySpec, the only orthopedic and reconstructive surgery service providing care via airplane to remote parts of Zambia – at no cost to patients.



SOAR into STEM students prepare an aircraft for maintenance

Wings of Hope provides the following in the Asia-Pacific region:

- Cambodia - Wings of Hope partners with John Givonetti Giving in an educational outreach program for students living in rural villages in Pursat Province.
- Papua New Guinea - Wings of Hope partners with Samaritan Aviation to provide emergency evacuation services, medical supply delivery, vaccine administration and community health initiatives to a region of 220,000 people along the Sepik River. Their two floatplanes

provide emergency flights to the only hospital within 37,000 square miles (about the area of Ohio).

In South America, Wings of Hope partners with the following:

- Belize - Belize Emergency Response Team
- Colombia - Patrulla Aérea Civil
- Ecuador - Alas de Socorro
- Nicaragua - Adventist World Aviation
- Paraguay - Iglesia Centro Cristiano Siloh

Opportunities on the Horizon

"UAVs provide interesting ways to extend humanitarian efforts to serve communities, especially in Africa and Latin America," Nelson explained. "We're building partnerships now to grow in the newly available technologies. We want to bring urgent anti-venom treatments and medical supplies to forested or hard-to-reach areas that a typical piloted aircraft can't easily access."

Educational Programming

Everyone in aviation these days is looking for enthusiastic, well-trained employees. Wings of Hope is actually doing something about it. In addition to Nelson's responsibilities in global initiatives, she also directs the efforts of Wings of Hope's education programs domestically. SOAR into STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), launched in partnership with Boeing, welcomes students into the Wings of Hope hangar in St. Louis for a dynamic hands-on


“
In all my
30 years of
aviation
publishing,
I've never
found a
greater
need for an
airplane.”

learning experience that explores principles of flight, aircraft maintenance, aerodynamics engineering, and Unmanned Aerial Systems. "We are currently hosting two learning modules per year for St. Louis area schools; however, requests to duplicate what we have created are starting to come in from outside of St. Louis. Teacher recruiting and training efforts for our summer module are in full swing, and we expect to launch a new remote program in fall 2023. Our goal is equitable access to aviation education for all students", Nelson explained.

How we can Help

Awareness is crucial to helping Wings of Hope reach its goals. Twin & Turbine is playing that role in a small way, but we hope that after reading this story, others in our robust aviation community can take advantage of the opportunity to assist. Whether providing a gift of financial support personally or through your


**Give your plane
a higher purpose.**



Wings of Hope's Airplane Donation Program

Give your plane a new life by donating it to Wings of Hope. Your plane, even if it is no longer airworthy, can play an essential role in our mission of changing and saving lives through the power of aviation. Our donation process is easy and the tax benefits are significant.

wingsofhope.ngo



Questions? Contact Mike Piccirilli at 314-705-9250
or mike.piccirilli@wingsofhope.ngo.

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organization's charitable programs, including Wings of Hope in your legacy giving, donating an airplane for domestic aircraft or volunteer needs, or taking part in SOAR into STEM, there are myriad ways to help. **T&T**

Learn more and contact Wings of Hope via its website, www.wingsofhope.ngo.

Lance Phillips is the Executive Director for the Pinnacle Air Network, a coalition of FBOs, MROs, and aircraft sales and charter organizations. He holds an FAA commercial license with instrument and multi-engine ratings and type ratings in the G100 and Beechjet aircraft. Lance has worked in management and executive leadership roles for pilot training and aircraft manufacturing organizations during his career. In addition to Twin & Turbine, Lance manages Phillips Aero Services and his creative outlet, Air & Asphalt. You can reach Lance by email at lance@twinandturbine.com.



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