

Who Knew Pulling a 25-ton Plane Could Be So Fun?

III jet 60 feet across the taxiway outside the Wings of Hope hangar.

Food, fun activities and music entertained spectators and participants of all ages. Families enjoyed delicious coffee and food from Bri's Coffee Bar and Bliss Food Truck while grooving to the tunes of DJ Carlos Suarez. Kids had a blast making art projects, racing pedal planes provided by the Gateway Youth Aeronautical Foundation and "flying" the Wings of Hope parade float plane.



Each team of 12 raised a minimum of \$1,000 for two chances to pull and record their best time. The competition was fierce, with the Secure Data Technologies team holding onto first place for most of the event. But in a dramatic turn of events, the Hockey Heroes for Hope team swooped in at the last minute with a competition-

winning pull of 14.58 seconds — edging out Secure Data's best time by just 0.17 seconds.

The event was free to attend, creating a fun and inclusive atmosphere for all.



Commerce.

We're grateful to all

who made this second annual event a success — including participants, volunteers, spectators and our generous sponsors: Dierbergs, AVMATS, Signature Aviation, Spirit of St. Louis Airport, St. Luke's Hospital, UHY, Scooter's Coffee, SFW Partners, Moneta, Fabick Cat, Secure Data Technologies, Simmons Bank, Brinkmann Constructors, Melissa Owens and the Chesterfield Regional Chamber of

Changing & Saving Lives Through the Power of Aviation





History of

Mike Stimac:

Science Teacher With an Early Connection to Wings of Hope



On Aug. 30, 2024, a visionary teacher and pilot who played an integral role in Wings of Hope's history peacefully passed away at the age of 101. We were fortunate to speak with Mike Stimac a few weeks before his passing and are grateful for his contribution to the early days of Wings of Hope.

ike Stimac was a science and math teacher, pilot and adventurer who dedicated his life to teaching young people and helping others. In the early 1960s, Stimac was teaching at St. Joseph's, an all-boys Catholic high school run by the Marianists in Cleveland. Beloved by his students, Stimac started a ham radio club that tracked Sputnik, the first satellite in space. He also established an aviation ground school which later evolved into a program to help students get their pilot licenses. In 1962, the Marianists told Stimac there was a need for a science and math teacher at a Catholic school they operated in Nairobi, Kenya. Stimac accepted the assignment at Mangu High School and quickly established an amateur radio club — one of his students would be the first Kenyan to get an amateur radio license — an electronics club and an aviation program. All these programs are still going strong today!

Stimac's first connection to Wings of Hope was Bishop Joseph Houlihan, who had set up a network of missionary medical clinics to serve people throughout the African desert. The bishop needed an efficient way to travel from clinic to clinic. He had a plane, a Super Cub that had been donated and ferried to Kenya by Bud Donovan and Jerry Fay. (Read the last issue of LIFT for their story.) But the bishop was waiting on a Catholic nun, Sister Michael Therese Ryan of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, to earn her pilot's license in Boston before she could join him in Africa as the first flying nun transporting people and supplies to the medical outposts.

While awaiting the sister's arrival, the bishop learned that a teacher at Mangu High School was a pilot. He drove out to the high school and asked Stimac if he would fly him to the clinics.

According to Stimac, Houlihan was a man you couldn't refuse. He remembered the bishop as "a dominant figure in the

mission territory" who was known for having the connections with church and government authorities that were needed to get things done.

Stimac was happy to support the bishop's work — flying the bishop, people and supplies between the medical clinics — but he also saw it as an educational opportunity for his students.

"Because I was connected with education, my tendency was always to bring it back to the kids," said Stimac.

The Mangu High School aviation program flourished under the tutelage of Stimac who would personally operate the bulldozer that carved out a runway for the school in a nearby field.

In the summer of 1963, Sister Ryan finally arrived in Kenya with her pilot's license fresh in hand. But the sister had no experience in bush flying which requires a unique set of skills to safely take off and land on short, make-shift runways. Stimac spent the next several weeks teaching Sister Ryan how to fly in the bush and taking her on orientation flights to each of the medical outposts.

In 1964, the Marianists called Stimac back to Ohio to resume his teaching career there. He also used his time in the states to raise money and handle airplane donations for the nonprofit he established to support the African missionary work: United Missionary Air Training and Transport — or UMATT.

According to Stimac, "what was needed was promotion — a live specimen out of Africa to speak directly to the crowd," and Stimac was happy to oblige.

He shared exciting stories of UMATT's missionary work helping the people of Kenya using an airplane and a flying nun, and sympathetic Americans responded with generous donations of cash and airplanes.



"As the work in Kenya and East Africa matured, we ended up having a couple of dedicated airplanes. Also, young people who wanted to build up time on their flight record would come out and fly for the operation at no cost, only their subsistence being taken care of," Stimac recalled. "They got an invaluable experience, and it was at a minimal cost — and we were able to keep the operation going. That was how the thing grew up, and that's also how a core of bush pilots emerged out of this operation."

As Stimac managed UMATT from Ohio, Sister Ryan continued flying missions in the Super Cub, which was quickly deteriorating due to harsh desert conditions and some hungry hyenas that apparently liked the taste of its fabric wings.

Halfway around the world in St. Louis, Joe Fabick and Bill Edwards, friends and businessmen who had learned of the plight of the flying nun and the Super Cub from Bishop Houlihan, were raising money to send a new metal Cessna to Kenya to support UMATT's work.



In the spring of 1965, the Marianists sent Stimac back to Africa. And in May of that year, he found himself in Rome meeting up with Max Conrad, a professional pilot who had been commissioned to fly the new Cessna from St. Louis to Nairobi. After an audience with Pope Paul VI, who blessed the UMATT banner and the work of the missionaries in Africa, Stimac flew with Conrad to Nairobi where Bishop Houlihan, Sister Ryan and the Medical Missionaries of Mary would use it to continue the good work of providing people throughout the desert region access to medical care and supplies.

UMATT would continue to grow in Africa, eventually becoming Wings for Progress and then Wings Over Africa. Stimac would continue helping the organization as a volunteer pilot and fundraiser and, eventually, would finish out his career conducting pilot ground training for Trans World Airlines in Saudi Arabia.

Back in St. Louis, Fabick and Edwards marveled at the impact UMATT was making with the one Cessna they had supplied and wondered how much more they could accomplish with more planes sent to more locations around the globe.

This inspired Fabick, Edwards and a few others to found Wings of Hope. More than six decades later, their vision for using planes to change and save lives — which was inspired, in part, by the work of a science teacher from Ohio — continues to impact thousands of people around the world every year.

WHY WE FLY Meet Sofia

ofia's first Wings of Hope flight from her home in western Kansas was her second time traveling to Shriners Children's St. Louis. The first trip took 12 hours one way by car.

"We're so grateful they (Shriners) suggested Wings of Hope," said her mom, Stacy.

The 15-year-old and her family had been searching for the right orthopedic surgeon to take on her case and provide her a hip replacement for years.

"We are praying this does the trick," said Stacy. "We're pretty excited."



It may seem unusual for a teenager to be excited about a hip replacement, but Sofia has plans.

First, she's looking forward to riding horses again: "That's what I was born to do," she said.

Second, she's been eyeing her brother Ricky's Trexo — a wearable robotic gait training device that helps children with disabilities walk — and she can't wait to get her own.

Sofia's recovery will require several post-op visits to Shriners, and we'll be with her every step of the way.



Meet Tayana

ometimes, as the saying goes, it takes a village to provide a child the care she needs.

Jayana requires complex pediatric care that is not available in her home country of Jamaica. At only three years old, Jayana traveled to the U.S., with the support of World Pediatrics and Ronald McDonald House Charities, for the second time this past summer. She and her mom, Shaneka, flew from Jamaica to Shriners Children's Ohio in Dayton for follow-up treatment for her craniofacial needs. Then, Wings of Hope flew the duo to Shriners Children's St. Louis for ongoing prosthetic eye care and orthopedic treatment for her clubfoot.





PARTNER Spotlight

PATRULLA AÉREA CIVIL COLOMBIANA (PAC)

ings of Hope partners with Patrulla Aérea Civil Colombiana (Colombia Civil Air Patrol), or PAC. This team of volunteer pilots and health care professionals has been flying into the most isolated places in Colombia, performing health brigades for the country's most vulnerable communities for nearly 60 years.

The places they visit have access to only the most basic medical services. If they need to see a specialist or require surgery, the people must travel to larger cities. Securing an appointment can take several months, and most patients can't afford the cost of traveling and staying in the cities — not to mention losing a day or more of wages and arranging for childcare.

Since getting to the hospital can be nearly impossible for people living in these communities, PAC takes the hospital to them. For two days, the organization's pop-up services transform a local

medical center or school into full-blown operating and consultation rooms. During these brigades, a PAC team of about 10 pilots and 50 volunteers set up a full working hospital with surgeons, pediatricians, dermatologists, nurses, optometrists — specialists the local people would likely never have the chance to see otherwise.

"When you're a doctor, you always think of helping people that need you," said Valentina Murillo, PAC medical director. "And when you're offering regular health services, you do help and improve people's lives — but reaching these vulnerable communities, you see the love and gratitude in people's eyes."

Murillo added that "being able to offer preventative services, on top of healing people's illnesses, is key."

PAC conducts health brigades once or twice a month, serving about 700 people every time.



Recently, PAC conducted a brigade focused on pediatric and nutritional health in La Primavera, Vichada, the second largest department in

Colombia with the highest acute malnutrition prevalence among children under five. While they were carrying out the brigade, the local clinic admitted a 13-year-old boy who had had an appendectomy a few days earlier. The boy's abdomen was distended, and he was experiencing discomfort. With limited equipment and supplies, the local doctor could not ascertain why the boy wasn't recovering from this routine procedure. Accessing treatment beyond the local doctor's office would not be easy: the boy would have had to wait months for

a specialist's appointment or drive about seven hours to the nearest urgent care center.

"The town's doctor knew our brigade included pediatricians and radiologists, so they referred him to us. Our pop-up hospital was able to take him in, perform an ultrasound and further examine his symptoms," said Alejandra Bernal, director of communications and marketing for PAC.

The PAC medical team decided the best course of action was to request an air ambulance, as the threat of sepsis, a life-threatening condition that stems from infection, were high. PAC performed all necessary paperwork, including ultrasound results and the pediatrician's diagnosis and referral, ensuring the boy would receive care immediately upon arrival at the hospital.

When he got to the hospital, the boy's diagnosis was confirmed as acute peritonitis, an extremely serious condition.

"We're happy to report he received treatment just in time," said Bernal. "If PAC hadn't been there, the outcome would have been fatal. Talk about being in the right place at the right time!"

Young Eagles Take Flight at Wings of Hope

n a sunny Saturday morning this past September, dozens of excited students and their parents — some of whom appeared more eager than their children — gathered at the Wings of Hope hangar to enjoy a Young Eagles Flight courtesy of EAA Chapter 1675.

The Young Eagles rally, which provides free flights for young people in the community, was a happy outgrowth of the special relationship between the local EAA chapter and Wings of Hope.

Home for a New Chapter

It all began when Wings of Hope volunteer John Heilmann spearheaded the founding of EAA Chapter 1675 about three years ago.

"We didn't have an EAA chapter here," said Heilmann, who is president of EAA Chapter 1675. "A lot of our volunteers here (at Wings of Hope) are part of the EAA, and we thought it would be great to have our own local chapter."

Once Heilmann and a few others formed the chapter, they needed a place to meet.

"Since many of our members work here at Wings of Hope, we thought we could

have it here in the hangar — which works out great," he said.

The chapter, which currently has about 55 members, meets monthly for dinner and a quest speaker in the Wings of Hope hangar.

"We have a really good turnout," said Heilmann.

Almost immediately after forming EAA Chapter 1675, the group started offering Young Eagles Flights for students participating in our SOAR into STEM program. The flights are the culmination — and highlight — of the hands-on, educational experience that brings middle and high school students into the Wings of Hope hangar for five Saturdays to work on aircraft under the careful guidance of mentors and

learn about STEM and aviation career paths. "Since Young Eagles Flights are a big part of the EAA — to give kids their first flight — it's just a natural fit for us to do that," said Heilmann. "I think it's a great program, and having a flight at the end of it is something the students really look forward to. It keeps them motivated during the classes."

Before EAA Chapter 1675 started providing Young Eagles Flights for the SOAR into STEM program, Wings of Hope paid for discovery flights using a local FBO. The relationship has been a huge boon to Wings of Hope, but the benefits run both ways.

Flights for the Community

Brian Williams is the Young Eagles Coordinator for EAA Chapter 1675. He



organizes Young Eagles rallies for the community, providing about 250 children and teens free Young Eagles flights annually. Wings of Hope hosts rallies at our headquarters. Students and families check





in at Wings of Hope, meet their pilots and then taxi out from the Wings of Hope tarmac to the airport runway for takeoff.

"It's been a good partnership," said Williams.
"We can give back to Wings of Hope for
them allowing us to use their facilities,
and these flights meet our youth program
mission, too."

Heilmann said hosting the Young Eagles rallies at Wings of Hope is "good for awareness for Wings of Hope."

"Parents brings kids, they come in, they can see the facility and we talk about what we do," he said.

Impacting Young People

Williams can relate to the excitement of the young people taking their first Young Eagles flight.

"I always knew I wanted to fly from a young age, and I tried to get into every little thing that I could that had to do with aviation," Williams said. "I took a Young Eagles flight back in 1998 at Oshkosh."

Today, Williams is a pilot for FedEx.

Heilmann, who often volunteers as a Young Eagles pilot, sees the impact the flights have on young people.

"Most of them are just super excited," he said. "Some of them, it changes their life. We flew one girl — it was her first flight, she was maybe 17 — and she said, 'This is what I want to do.' A year after we took her up on her first Young Eagles flight, she soloed."

VOLUNTEER Spotlight

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of Wings of Hope. Whether they are in the hangar working on planes or in the front office managing administrative and financial tasks, we depend on them to do mission-critical work that keeps our wings in the air and our operations running smoothly.

KATHIE HAFERKAMP

ACCOUNTING

Kathie Haferkamp joined us as a volunteer in the accounting department about four years ago. A certified public accountant (CPA), she first learned about Wings of Hope through her church.

"Several of our members have been very active at Wings of Hope through the years," she said.

Kathie remembered bringing her Sunday school class to Wings of Hope to volunteer pulling weeds.



"After I retired, I decided that I would volunteer."

She interviewed for a position as a volunteer receptionist — but when the Volunteer Fulfillment team discovered she was an accountant, they were quick to find her a role where she could put her expertise to work.

Kathie said supporting Wings of Hope's work is "the single biggest reason" she keeps coming back every Wednesday to volunteer.

"I believe in the mission of the organization," she said, "and everyone here is very nice to work with."

PEGGY STELLOH

ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Peggy Stelloh supports two teams at Wings of Hope: Administration and Development.

"I generally work in the office once a week but try to be available to help for crunch times," she said.

Her tasks range from using her IT background to



support our donor database to helping out with fundraisers, special events and ad hoc projects.

Peggy started volunteering at Wings of Hope in August 2015, just 16 months after retiring from Boeing.

"I picked Wings of Hope because of the aviation aspect of the charity," she recalled.

When she learned about how we were using aviation to help people around the globe, "I was committed," said Peggy.

Now in her 10th year of volunteering at Wings of Hope, Peggy said she keeps coming back because of "the mission and the great volunteers and staff I get to work with."

When she began volunteering for Wings of Hope, she had no idea how personal that mission would become.

"Because of my knowledge and association with Wings, I was able to recommend a family member contact Wings for transportation to St. Louis for a surgery he could not get in his area. It's been a great experience for me."

LARRY MASTERS

FACILITY MAINTENANCE

Larry Masters has been a weekly fixture in the Wings of Hope hangar for more than 30 years. Now 90, Larry started volunteering with us in 1992 after retiring from Monsanto.

A jack-of-all trades in the hangar, Larry has used his mechanical engineering background to work on a number of projects including upgrading avionics on our airplanes.

During the flood of 1993, he was working in Wings of Hope's "old" hangar (down the road at Spirit of St. Louis Airport) when he was pulled into service to help evacuate an airplane from the hangar before it was damaged by the flood.

"I was also helping after the flood hit and the water receded," said Larry. "We were trying to salvage the spare parts located on the second floor."

Larry has worked on a lot of airplanes through the years, but he and the hangar crew work on just about anything.

"We get oddball stuff that nobody can fix or they can't find a replacement for — and we build it."

One unique project that Larry and a few others worked on was building a 1935 model airplane from scrap to represent Wings of Hope at local parades.

"We did it for the kids who come out to see us in parades," Larry said.

Larry volunteers in the hangar once a week. He would consider volunteering more but he is very involved with the community where he resides at Friendship Village. He participates in several activities including a Brain Fitness class: "We do exercise for two hours with our brains — trying to keep sharp."



But his biggest commitment is participating on the bocce ball team which won its latest tournament by one point.

"It's a lot of fun," said Larry.

As much as he loves the social aspects of living at Friendship Village, Larry also enjoys the camaraderie of volunteering at Wings of Hope.

"There are a lot of pilots, a lot of mechanics, a lot of people with various skills," he said. "We do things for other people around the world, and I like to be involved in that."

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Wings of Hope, and the many donors for their thoughtful and generous
tribute gifts honoring family and loved ones.*

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Airplane Raffle Winner Has Plans for Plane

hen Jared received a phone call from Wings of Hope with the news that he had won our spring airplane raffle, he called the experience "surreal."

This was his first time participating in a Wings of Hope airplane raffle, and it happened by chance.

"I was on a website looking to buy a plane and stumbled upon an ad for the airplane raffle," he said.

He read about Wings of Hope and thought, "It's going to a good cause. I'll throw my name in there — I'll never get it."

"Never say never" has taken on a whole new meaning to Jared who has plans for his new Piper Cherokee 180.



"My long-term dream is to start a nonprofit aeroclub to help the crew chiefs and the loadmasters at my Air National Guard base get their private pilot's license," he said.

Jared, who flies C-130s for the California Air National Guard and is a flight instructor, said the base prefers that those applying to the military pilot training program already have a private pilot's license. Many applicants have some flight experience, he said, but if they have their private pilot's license "they have already demonstrated their aptitude to learn how to fly."

"But the cost is crazy to get a private pilot's license and to rent a 172, so I've been thinking about ways to try to drive that cost down for these enlisted troops," he said.

Jared is also dad to four children, ranging in age from seven to 14. He said he is hoping "at least a couple of my kids will want to learn how to fly" when they get a little older.

Until then, he is excited to use the plane to take them on weekend adventures.

"I've always wanted to take the kids to weekend getaways that would just be too far for a car to go on a weekend," he said. "This plane will definitely open up opportunities to have fun with the kids."





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