

# LIFT

SUMMER 2023 | VOL.9 | ISSUE 1

## Gala Soars at New Venue

The Wings of Hope Soaring to New Heights Gala presented by Fabick Cat shown bright on April 29 at the Hilton St. Louis Frontenac, a new venue for the signature fundraiser which was held in the spring for the first time in event history.

Back for the third consecutive year, emcee and auctioneer Rene Knott kept the crowd entertained and the energy high on a night when more than 300 guests gathered to celebrate and support our mission-critical work changing and saving lives through the power of aviation.

Successful silent and live auctions and generous event sponsorships generated significant funds to support the services and programs that fuel the Wings of Hope mission — and families who have benefited from those services were in attendance, adding more meaning to every dollar raised.



Thirteen-year-old Caleb Voyles and his mom, Crystal, attended the gala and were featured in a video shown to attendees depicting Caleb's Wings of Hope journey which began with a flight to Shriners Children's St. Louis from his home in Wichita, KS, when he was only two years old. Today, Caleb is nearing the end of treatment to lengthen the femur bone on his right leg, which was shorter than his left at birth, and is on track to fully recover before he turns 15.

Crystal said flying with Wings of Hope "eases the stress and anxiety" of traveling to St. Louis and makes the trip a lot more comfortable for Caleb.



"Without Wings of Hope we would be spending a lot more time on the road, Caleb would be missing more school and my other two kids would be missing more time with us," she said.

Claire Biangardi and her mom, Marianne, who were also featured in the video, joined in the festivities as well. Almost 13, Claire flew with Wings of Hope from St. Louis to Cincinnati Children's Hospital to treat a rare and life-threatening cancer when she was a toddler. Now, a cheerleader and tennis player, Claire is a bubbly teen ready to take on the world.

"It's extremely important to support Wings of Hope because they help so many families around the world," Marianne said. "Just being able to count on them to fly your child back and forth to treatment and not worry about the cost is huge. We are so grateful to Wings of Hope and the impact they've had on our family's lives."



*Changing & Saving Lives  
Through the Power of Aviation*

# Is It Summer Already?

2023 is off to a roaring start for Wings of Hope. Not even halfway through the year and we've already celebrated a successful Soaring to New Heights Gala, completed the fifth year of our SOAR into STEM program for students in our hangar, welcomed four very accomplished professionals to our board — and did I mention it's our 60th anniversary?

Enjoy this issue of LIFT.

As you read about the many efforts happening in our hangar and around the globe, please keep in mind that all of our work — and each life it impacts — is only possible because of your support.

Thank you!

**Amy Cole Buehler, MA**

Interim President

## PATIENT UPDATE



Micah at 11.



Micah at 16.

## Frequent Flyer Micah Has Mixed Emotions About Last Flight

**M**icah is one of Wings of Hope's frequent flyers. Born with one leg shorter than the other, the now 16-year-old has been flying with Wings of Hope from her home in Kansas to Shriners Children's St. Louis since she was five. After 16 surgeries and countless follow-up appointments at Shriners, Micah is close to completing her treatment. She and her mom consider Wings of Hope a "home away from home."

Micah says her last flight with Wings of Hope will be bittersweet: "You guys have watched me grow up."

And her mom says, "We don't know what we would have done without Wings of Hope."

Micah will be a junior in high school in the fall, and she is on track to graduate early. While she's not quite sure what she wants to do after graduation, being a flight attendant is on her short list.

Assuming everything goes as expected, doctors anticipate Micah's final Wings of Hope flight will take place in July, just a month before her 17th birthday.

# SOAR Into STEM Takes Students Out of the Hangar — and Into the World

**W**ings of Hope launched SOAR into STEM (SIS) in 2019 to inspire students to pursue STEM and aviation careers — and gain a new understanding and appreciation for the important role airplanes can play in changing and saving lives around the world.

This past April, one SIS graduate had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take his experience full circle when he visited our partner in Ecuador, Alas de Socorro, which provides emergency medical flights to eight indigenous communities who lack access to critical medical care.

Jordan was one of three students who made the trip — all study entrepreneurship with Wings of Hope partner Go! International, a nonprofit that uplifts students from East St. Louis, a historically underserved and impoverished community. The organization educates students in financial literacy, language and entrepreneurship with a number of students traveling internationally to help artisans around the world bring their products to market. Go! International Founder Seth Hamilton led the students on their trip to the Wings of Hope partner base in Shell, Ecuador.

Hamilton, who has chaperoned several student trips abroad, called the Ecuador excursion “the most impactful trip we’ve had.”

Central to the trip was traveling into the Amazon rainforest to meet with the Waorani, or Wao, tribe. Jordan, who is interested in pursuing a career in politics, had the unique opportunity to discuss leadership with the president of the Wao community. The students also met



Jordan, Kylie and Tomminsha



Go! International Founder Seth Hamilton (middle) and students meet members of the Wao community.

with an organization which supports women entrepreneurs in their business ventures.

“We met with the directors of the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon,” Hamilton said. “They have been training Waorani women in 58 communities to run their own businesses since 2005. They also produce one of the only 100% organic cacao beans in Ecuador — and East St. Louis students from Go! International will be their first international import partners.”

The students are working with Mutombo, a U.S. coffee manufacturer, to import the cacao beans for use in the making of the company’s hot chocolate mix.

“This has been the most amazing experience that we’ve had,” said Hamilton. “I just thank you (Wings of Hope) so much for providing this opportunity for our kids. It’s unreal. I’m just really grateful.”

# History of HOPE

In each issue of LIFT, we use the History of Hope feature to share a little about the individuals who have been formative in the history and growth of Wings of Hope.



Sister Michael Therese Ryan



Max Conrad and Joe Fabick.  
St. Louis Lambert International  
Airport, May 25, 1965.

## Sister Michael Therese Ryan

Did you know Wings of Hope's claim to fame is enlisting the original "Flying Nun" as a volunteer pilot in the 1960s?

In 1963 — before we were even called Wings of Hope — our founders raised money to send a Piper Super Cub to Marianist missionaries who were flying medical supplies and support to people living in the Turkana desert who had endured a disastrous famine and floods.

When Sister Michael Therese Ryan of the Medical Missionaries of Mary earned her private pilot's license in the early 1960s, she also earned the distinction of being the first Catholic nun to do so — well before the American television sitcom, "The Flying Nun," debuted in 1967. Sister "Bird," as she would soon be known, flew the Super Cub until it was falling apart, literally, due to hyenas nibbling away at the wings at night. Apparently, they were attracted to the phenol in the wings' fabric covering.

That's when Wings of Hope founders, led by Joe Fabick and Bill Edwards, launched a capital campaign to raise \$30,000 to purchase a new Cessna U206, an all-metal aircraft better suited to withstand Kenya's harsh desert conditions — and its hungry hyenas.

The plane made history at a ceremonial takeoff from St. Louis Lambert International Airport on May 25, 1965. Flown by legendary pilot, Max Conrad, the plane would make several stops along the way — including Rome for a blessing by Pope Paul VI — before arriving at its final destination in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 10, 1965.



Bill Edwards,  
Max Conrad and  
Joe Fabick



Max Conrad hands Sister Bird keys to new plane.

## Global Humanitarian Network: Samaritan Aviation



Clockwise from top left: Clara and newborn son; Samaritan Aviation floatplane; Samaritan Aviation team loads patient into floatplane; Clara's infant son

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a relatively small country with population estimates ranging between 8 and 11 million people. It is also one of the most culturally diverse countries with people speaking 840 languages. More than 80% of the population lives in rural areas, with 250,000 people living along the 700-mile stretch of the East Sepik River surrounded by a dense jungle with virtually no roads or electricity and little to no access to emergency medical care. Infant mortality rates in the area are often as high as 40 percent, and 80 percent of people living along the river suffer from malaria.

This is where our partner in PNG is making a difference.

Samaritan Aviation is the only organization in the region that operates floatplanes. They use these planes as air ambulances to serve more than 116 villages each year — flying people with dire medical needs to the nearest hospital, flying medicine and medical supplies into villages, and providing aid to remote areas during natural disasters and disease outbreaks.

Since 2010, Samaritan Aviation has flown more than 2,800 missions, all at no cost to the people they serve. Floatplanes turn a five-to-seven-day trip in a dugout canoe into an hourlong flight to the

hospital. When it comes to access to antivenom after a snakebite or saving the life of a mother and baby during a complicated delivery every minute is vital.

“Samaritan Aviation is a lifeline to all those people living along the river,” said Mark Palm, Samaritan Aviation CEO and co-founder. “Most of the emergencies we deal with are life and death critical — if we’re not here, people are dying.”

Pregnancy complications make up about 39% of those lifesaving missions. Here’s the story of two missions, two years apart that provided hope and healing for one young woman.

Samaritan Aviation first met Clara in 2014 when the organization received a call for a woman with a retained placenta. After a difficult pregnancy, she had lost her baby and needed surgery. Samaritan Aviation flew Clara to the hospital for treatment and cared for her until she was strong enough to return home. Two years later, Samaritan Aviation received another call from Clara who was experiencing another complicated pregnancy. The Samaritan Aviation team quickly responded to the call and transported Clara to the nearest hospital with a much happier result: she gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

# Welcome New Board Members!

*This past April, Wings of Hope welcomed four new members to our board of directors. Each brings a wealth of experience, business acumen and professional connections to strengthen our organization.*

**KATE SCHNEIDER**  
**Vice President, Acquisition**  
**Integration and Technical Program**  
**Management, Mastercard**

Kate has spent her entire career at Mastercard Worldwide where she started as an intern while completing her bachelor's degree at St. Louis University. She also holds an MBA from Webster University. In her first 25 years at Mastercard, she held various finance roles participating in and leading some of the most pivotal moments in the company's history from the merger with a European entity, to the company's IPO, to a merger that set up a significant technology hub in Pune, India. After a brief break from Mastercard, Kate was recruited back to lead an acquisition integration and currently works with the Technology Strategy organization.



Kate is married to her high school sweetheart and has four children. While they were younger, she served as president of her children's parochial school board and volunteered with the CYC Parish Athletic Association. Today, she serves on the executive board of the Archdiocesan high school Athletic Boosters. Kate and her husband love to attend fundraisers and galas to support their friends and family's favorite charities.

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**PATRICK BOWEN**  
**Senior Vice President, Simmons Bank**

A lifelong banker, Patrick has spent most of his career working in the St. Louis community financing commercial real estate and small businesses, as well as churches and other nonprofit organizations. The banks Patrick has worked for through the years have supported his involvement with organizations such as the St. Louis County Economic Council, the St. Louis Zoo, Junior Achievement, Boy Scouts of America, Artscope, Immaculate Conception of Dardenne Parish and coaching a couple of softball teams. Patrick is a graduate of St. Louis Country Day School and the University of the South.



Don Kukla, former chairman of the Wings of Hope Board, introduced Patrick to Wings of Hope in February 2022. Having a lifelong interest in aviation and his private pilot's license, Patrick was "sold" after a hangar tour and joined the gala host committee. He also recently finished his third stint as a SOAR into STEM mentor. Patrick and his wife, Susan, have four children — triplet daughters and a son — and live in the Lake St. Louis area.

**CHRISTIAN RUSTEBERG**  
**Corporate Strategy Leader, Ameren**

Christian is an experienced corporate strategy leader responsible for developing and implementing strategies that help Ameren achieve its long-term goals. He works closely with senior executives to identify market trends and opportunities, analyze business data and make recommendations for improving the company's competitive position.



Prior to joining Ameren, Christian was director of Corporate Strategy at First Bank. He also held various leadership positions in operations, including leading process improvement efforts for bank operations, and was the bank lead for operational M&A activity.

Christian holds an MBA and bachelor's degree in business management from Western Illinois University and is a certified Strategic Planning Professional. An active Wings of Hope volunteer, Christian has served as a volunteer field coordinator in Belize, Ecuador, Guiana, Antigua and Barbuda. He is a partner and co-founder of American Heroes, a national program that supports households with Armed Forces family members serving overseas, as well as police/firefighters and those who died in 9/11.

Christian lives in St. Louis with his wife, Melinda, and German Shepherd, Heidi, with whom he enjoys all his outdoor adventures.

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**MATT TEMPLE**  
**Senior Account Executive**  
**UnitedHealthcare**

Matt is a veteran in the employee benefits industry. Throughout his career, he has been selected to develop new markets and champion game-changing innovation that has effectively reduced the increasing cost of health care for employees and members. Matt earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri. His hobbies are fitness, ice hockey, personal development and spending time with family, especially his wife, Megan, and two daughters.



# Thank You

## FOR SUPPORTING WINGS OF HOPE

We are so grateful to the corporations and foundations who support Wings of Hope, and the many donors for their thoughtful and generous tribute gifts honoring family and loved ones.\*

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