

LIFT

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Teams Pull for Hope — and Bragging Rights — at First Plane Pull



Wings of Hope's inaugural Pulling for Hope fundraiser took place on October 14 — a windy Saturday that started off rainy — on the tarmac outside the Wings of Hope hangar. But the chilly conditions couldn't cool the enthusiasm of the eight teams participating in the organization's first-ever plane pull: Team Fabick Cat, Board Plane Pullers (Wings of Hope Board of Directors), AVMATS Afterburners, Heirloom Wealth Partners, Husch Blackwell Law Firm, Wing Dings, Secure Data Technologies, and UHY Advisors & ADB Companies.

The teams, who each raised a minimum of \$1,000 for their chance to pull a 15-ton (including tug) Sabreliner jet in a 30-foot timed pull, egged each other on in a friendly competition to claim bragging rights for the fastest time.

Each team had two chances to pull and record their lowest time.

UHY Advisors & ADB Companies won with a time of 11.22 seconds — just a fraction ahead of Secure Data who came in at 11.27 seconds and AVMATS Afterburners who secured third place with a time of 11.73 seconds.

Volunteers kept the races moving along, while guests cheered on their favorite teams and noshed on a variety of offerings from food trucks: Pappy's Smokehouse, Wayno's Mobile International Cuisine and Lily's Café Ice Cream Truck. Teams and spectators escaped the cold in the Wings of Hope hangar, where they enjoyed music from DJ Carlos Suarez, a disc throw game and Party Animals Mobile stuff-a-bears for purchase.

The event was possible through generous support from the following sponsors: Dierbergs, AVMATS, Signature Aviation, Spirit of St. Louis Airport and St. Luke's Hospital.

Wildly successful for a first-time event, Wings of Hope's Development team is already planning for the second annual Pulling for Hope to take place Oct. 5, 2024 — plenty of time to gather your team and train!



*Changing & Saving Lives
Through the Power of Aviation*

What's Happening in the Wings of Hope Hangar?

Wings of Hope is a global humanitarian network of partners serving people in nine countries, but the heart and soul of the organization is its hangar at Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield, Mo.

A quick walk through the Wings of Hope hangar reveals an exceptionally clean and bright space dotted with planes in various states of repair and a crew of licensed mechanics and volunteers making sure the aircraft are well maintained.

PRIORITY NO. 1: MAINTAINING THE MAT FLEET

Steve Johnson, Wings of Hope's director of maintenance, said most of the work focuses on keeping the three planes serving the organization's Medical Relief & Air Transport (MAT) Program airworthy.

"Our number one priority is the MAT aircraft," said Johnson.

The MAT fleet is three, twin-engine airplanes that Wings of Hope uses to provide free patient flights to hospitals and medical centers within about an 800-mile range of the Wings of Hope hangar.

"Sixty to 70 percent of our time is focused on maintaining the MAT airplanes," Johnson said.

And these high-time aircraft require regular maintenance.

"Every time they fly — every time — we have to work on them when they come back. It's minor stuff — oil leaks, brakes, tires, filters. They are 40-50-year-old aircraft that require constant maintenance."

Plus, each airplane has two engines which adds to their maintenance needs.

"The second priority for Steve and his crew are the raffle planes — they bring in a lot of money," said Mike Piccirilli, who manages aircraft sales and donations for Wings of Hope.

Wings of Hope raffles off two airplanes annually which generates about \$800,000.

"The raffle planes are primarily donated," said Piccirilli. "It's not as much fixing them up as going through and taking care of squawks (minor maintenance issues) and avionics upgrades."

If a raffle plane needs an engine overhaul, Piccirilli said the work is usually outsourced. Performing

the raffle planes' annual inspections requires an A&P/IA (airframe and powerplant/inspection authorization) mechanic, and the licensed mechanics at Wings of Hope are already stretched thin maintaining the MAT fleet.

Last on the list of priorities for the maintenance crew are aircraft that are donated for sale. Currently, Wings of Hope receives about eight to 10 donated aircraft every year. Most are not appropriate for use in the field so the maintenance crew will fix minor squawks before Piccirilli finds a buyer. The annual inspections for sales aircraft are outsourced.

"We might do some minor maintenance or cosmetic work but, overall, we don't do a lot of maintenance on the sales aircraft," Johnson said.

HELP WANTED: MECHANICS AND AVIONICS TECHNICIANS

In the past, the maintenance team has worked on preparing airplanes for work in the field. Most recently, the crew worked on a Cessna 182 for over a year before sending it to Paraguay to support the Wings of Hope partner base there in 2020.

This type of work is increasingly difficult as Johnson, an A&P/IA mechanic, oversees a bare-bones staff of four paid mechanics (one of whom also works on avionics) and 12-14 volunteers.

"We need mechanics and avionics technicians," he said.

One problem is the industrywide shortage of mechanics. Another is the skillset required to maintain the Wings of Hope fleet.

"The type of aircraft we work on — we're a dying breed," Johnson explained. "There are not a lot of mechanics who work on piston-powered aircraft or light aircraft. The majority of the younger mechanics coming up want to work on new turbine engines."

Johnson explained that unlike with turbine engine aircraft, there are no computerized monitoring systems or diagnostic tests to help mechanics diagnose what's wrong with a piston-powered airplane.

"The aircraft we work on require a skillset of



understanding how an engine operates," Johnson said. "You have to troubleshoot it because there's no monitoring like you have on newer automobiles — any data you see, it's after the fact."

VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Johnson estimates that about 50 percent of the maintenance in the hangar is performed by volunteers. Most have a background in maintenance or engineering, and their skillsets vary. When a new volunteer joins the team, Johnson works to find them a job that fits.

"Once we figure out what their skillset is and what they like to do, we try to find those tasks that they enjoy and are capable of doing," he said.

Whatever skills they bring to the hangar, volunteers are invaluable, Johnson said: "They free up the time for us to focus on what it is that needs to be done that requires a licensed mechanic."

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) allows volunteers who are not licensed mechanics to work on aircraft as long as their work is supervised and approved by a licensed mechanic.

"That's how our volunteers are able to work on aircraft without having a license," said Johnson.

Johnson said the hangar volunteers "believe in what they're doing — and they want to make a difference."

"I can't stress how impressed I am with someone giving up their time like these volunteers do," he said. "There are guys who come in here regularly, just like they're working a paid staff position. To be retired, to have time off, and to say, 'you know what, I'm going to go in and go to work' — I just respect that so much."

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A PERSONAL CONNECTION

That desire to make a difference also motivates Johnson, along with the work environment.

"This is a good place to work," he said. "Our hangar is absolutely top notch. It's a wonderful environment for aircraft maintenance."

He praised the clean, bright, warm facilities, but Johnson said the most powerful motivation for him to come to work each day is personal.

"I have a daughter who was born with cerebral palsy, so I have a direct understanding of what it's like to have a child with a disability. And I can relate to those parents who come here with a sick child."

Johnson said he "can only imagine as a parent how comforting it must feel" to hear that Wings of Hope is able to transport their child to the care they need — for free.

"Free here means free," he said. "When we say we can get your child to the hospital, it doesn't matter how much money you have — we will get your child there."



Steve Johnson, Wings of Hope
Director of Maintenance

And providing that level of care and compassion — with no strings attached — strikes a chord with Johnson.

"I believe in what we're doing," he said. "I'm here because I want to contribute. I want to make a difference."

Wings of Hope is always looking for licensed mechanics, avionics technicians and volunteers. To explore paid and volunteer positions, visit <https://wingsofhope.ngo/get-involved/opportunities/>.

The Piccirillis: A Wings of Hope Family Affair

When Wings of Hope's longtime housekeeper retired this past March, Mike "Pic" Piccirilli, aircraft donation and sales representative for the organization, asked Director of Human Resources Angela Walleman if his daughter, Jenny, could take over that role. The answer was a resounding "yes." And over the past several months, Jenny has become a cherished member of the Wings of Hope family, often working alongside her dad and her mom, Mary, who is a regular volunteer.

Director of Operations Tim Long recently observed all three Piccirillis in the hangar helping prepare for a weekend special event.

"It struck me as something very special that within the Wings of Hope family is a family striving together to help us all change and save lives through the power of aviation: Jenny, as a staff member; Pic, as a contract employee; and Mary, as a volunteer," said Long. "Together, this one family covers all of the roles of service to our humanitarian organization."

Mary shared that "aviation has always been a part of our family's life."

"Mike's father instructed pilots during World War II and continued flight instruction part time throughout his life, which included helping Mike get his pilot's license. Our entire family feels fortunate to have found Wings of Hope as a way of giving back to others the joy and value of general aviation."

Mike was the first Piccirilli to join Wings of Hope. After retiring from Boeing, he found a meaningful second career selling the donated aircraft the organization receives to help fund its mission. Combining his love for aviation and his knowledge of aircraft — it was the perfect fit for Mike.

"He had found his niche in life," Mary said.

"When a position cleaning the administrative facilities became available for our daughter, Jenny, we knew that an answer to our prayers had come," she said. "Finding a welcoming, safe, loving environment for her to work had always been a concern of ours due to her disabilities, including a seizure disorder and autism."

Today, all three Piccirillis can be found working and volunteering at Wings of Hope — often on the same day.

Mary has taken on the role of job coach for Jenny: "As her mom, I know her strengths and am able to provide her the tools she needs to be successful."

Success, to Jenny, "is making the offices a happy place by keeping the facilities clean and fresh," said Mary.

"Jenny loves her job and tells everyone how much she looks forward to coming to work and how much she misses it when she can't come in due to illness or vacation," she added.

As much as the family has given to the organization, Mary cherishes what they have received.

"What a gift that has been given to our family," she said. "Wings of Hope has become our home away from home where we can work together to help in continuing the legacy of Wings of Hope — changing and saving lives through the power of aviation."



Mary, Mike and Jenny Piccirilli

Wings of Hope Receives \$2.5 Million Gift from Donald and Ruth Malvern Foundation

*Malvern legacy will continue to
fund hope and healing for years to come*

In the summer of 2023, Wings of Hope received two gifts totaling \$2,544,565, one from the Donald and Ruth Malvern Foundation (\$27,142) and the other from Ruth Malvern Charitable Distribution Trust (\$2,517,423). This is the largest charitable gift Wings of Hope has ever received. And it is fitting that it came during our 60th anniversary year, as Don and Ruth Malvern played outsized roles in shaping the history of Wings of Hope and helping us grow into the organization we are today.

Don Malvern joined Wings of Hope as chairman of the board and president in 1989, about a quarter-century after the organization was founded in 1963. Those first 26 years of the fledgling nonprofit's existence were marked by growth but little consistent direction.

Longtime Wings of Hope volunteer Gene Pfautsch remembers when Don first joined Wings of Hope after retiring as president of McDonnell Aircraft Company.

"As my memory serves me, Joe Dobronski (part of Wings of Hope's leadership at the time) invited Don to Wings of Hope sometime in 1988 or 1989. Don, after looking at the books, said, 'You're going broke!'"

Larry Lemke, who worked as a vice president under Don at McDonnell Aircraft and joined Wings of Hope in 1996, recalled that the organization was facing some "significant financial issues" before Don took the helm.

Don turned things around by bringing his professional experience and business skills to bear in his role as Wings of Hope's new leader. He reorganized Wings of Hope into functions such as human resources and aircraft maintenance, established new protocols for generating revenue and applied cost-cutting measures.

"It is my firm belief," said Pfautsch, "that Don Malvern saved Wings of Hope."

Lemke concurred: "Don Malvern saved this place."

Fred Meyland-Smith, current chairman of the Wings of Hope Board of Directors, offered his perspective on Don's role as architect of a financially stable Wings of Hope:

For the first 25 years or so, Wings of Hope was an immature organization that was a collection of friends who were well-intentioned and were committed to helping people in need. But it was unstructured, it was undisciplined. It was just a collegial group of friends who founded an organization that was not a product of a strategic plan but invented on the fly.

Now you get this very accomplished executive from a major corporation who is retired. I suspect he felt like he still had a lot of gas in the tank — and because he was in the aviation industry and this is an aviation-based humanitarian organization, he came here. He provided the structure, the discipline, the deeper thinking, the strategic planning and developed a set of priorities and some business plans on how to continue to grow the organization.

In short, Don provided leadership.

Lemke said Don's leadership inspired him to join Wings of Hope as a volunteer in 1996, eventually leading to his election as board chair after Don retired in 2004. He recalled the influence that



Don Malvern (left) and Larry Lemke in 2003

Ruth Malvern (left) with Jean Murry, Wings of Hope volunteer and member of The Ninety-Nines, at the 2014 Ladies' Luncheon



Don had on the many McDonnell Aircraft retirees whom he recruited to join Wings of Hope.

"They were retired," Lemke said. "They could have easily said, 'Don, I'm going to play golf. I'm not going to get involved!'"

"But that leadership, that relationship that he had with those people — including me — was a leadership that said, 'This is an important thing for you in your life!'"

An influx of McDonnell Aircraft retirees soon followed Don to Wings of Hope.

Lemke said Don helped him reflect on how he wanted to spend his retirement years, which included running his company — and serving both his church and Wings of Hope.

He remembered thinking: "I'm going to spend the rest of my life doing three things, and one of them is Wings of Hope."

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"I would say that the \$2.5 million is Don and Ruth's way of saying we want to continue to provide hope and healing to the hurting people of the world."

—Larry Lemke

Don retired as chairman for health reasons in 2004 and died in 2006.

Ruth shared her husband's interest in aviation. She obtained her private pilot's license in 1970 and was a member of The Ninety-Nines, an international organization of licensed women pilots. She supported Don's work at Wings of Hope and could often be found working alongside him.

Lemke recalled his first Wings of Hope Board meeting: "Ruth is there — and she's taking notes."

In the 17 years that followed Don's passing until her death at 101 years of age in February 2023, Ruth continued to support Wings of Hope, both financially and through her participation in Wings of Hope events. She was a regular attendee at our annual gala.

Meyland-Smith has a distinct memory of Ruth from one of the last galas she attended in 2020. He was on stage helping with the Fund-a-Need portion of the event, in which guests are encouraged to raise their paddle for one final fundraising push.

"I was at the podium, and she was sitting to my left raising her paddle. I remember it like it was yesterday," he recalled.

Consider Wings of Hope in your legacy planning. When you include Wings of Hope in your estate plan, your generosity ensures that Wings of Hope can change and save lives through the power of aviation well into the future. Discover more at wingsofhope.mylegacygift.org.

Lemke said Ruth was always the first to raise her paddle at the many galas she attended, and that night was no different. He was sitting at Ruth's table.

"At one point, she looks over at me and then she reaches in her purse and pulls out a checkbook and says, 'Have you got a pen?' She wrote out the check for \$10,000 and gave it to me to give to Fred."

Don and Ruth's legacy of service and generosity to Wings of Hope culminated in their final gift to the organization on Ruth's passing.

"At the end of her life, I can just visualize Ruth at the table raising her paddle for \$2.5 million," said Lemke.

He sees the Malvern's gift as one final set of marching orders from the couple who devoted so much of their lives to supporting the organization's good work.

"I would say that the \$2.5 million is Don and Ruth's way of saying we want to continue to provide hope and healing to the hurting people of the world. That's what Wings of Hope was about from the very beginning — and that's what it continues to be about today."



Ruth Malvern and Larry Lemke at the 2018 Wings of Hope Gala

Wings of Hope Promotes Amy Cole Buehler to President

On Aug. 8, 2023, the Wings of Hope Board of Directors announced Amy Cole Buehler as the organization's new president.

Buehler, who had been serving as interim president since December 2022, is the first woman to helm the organization which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

"Promoting Amy to president is a milestone event for Wings of Hope," said Board Chairman Fred Meyland-Smith. "After a nine-month search for a new president — and extensive deliberation and intense discussions with Amy, our executive committee, staff and volunteers — our board unanimously chose Amy to lead us into our next chapter. She is incredibly smart, decisive, inclusive and passionate about our mission. Simply put, she is the right person for the job."

An experienced nonprofit executive, Buehler joined Wings of Hope as director of development in August 2019. Over the past 30 years, she has helped raise millions of dollars for many St. Louis-area and statewide organizations, in both professional and volunteer roles. She served as the executive director for both the Animal Protective Association of Missouri Therapeutic Horsemanship (now TREE House of Greater St.

Louis) and the Parkway Alumni Association. In 2008, Buehler founded Amy Cole Buehler & Assoc., LLC, a consulting firm dedicated to working alongside nonprofit organizations throughout Missouri to further their strategic goals through planning, training, board development, fundraising and coaching.

"I am honored and excited to serve Wings of Hope as its next president and its first woman president," said Buehler. "I hold the mission of this organization very dear, so you can rest assured that we will always remain mission-focused — and we will look to that as our guiding light as we move forward as an organization."



IN THE *Spotlight*



Boeing Funds SOAR into STEM Growth With \$100,000 Grant

On Saturday, Nov. 11, Monique Bynum, community investor for Boeing, presented Wings of Hope with a ceremonial \$100,000 check at the organization's Career Exploration Fair which was held in the Wings of Hope hangar to coincide with the final session of the fall SOAR into STEM program.

The Boeing Global Engagement grant is the latest in Boeing's support for SOAR into STEM which Boeing has been generously funding since we launched the hands-on STEM and aviation education program for students. Boeing provided the seed funding for the 2019 pilot program and has awarded grants every year since for a total of nearly \$565,000 in financial support.

"Boeing's support has been nothing short of life-changing for the hundreds of students who've participated in the SOAR into STEM program," said Wings of Hope President Amy Cole Buehler. "Five years into the program, we've already seen program graduates go on to earn their pilot's license, receive educational and flight training scholarships, and pursue STEM and aviation education in college. One young man, inspired to become a pilot after attending our SOAR into STEM program, was even admitted to the Air Force Academy."

The 2023 grant will fund the expansion of SOAR into STEM into Washington, Mo., serving students in the Washington School District about an hour's drive west of Wings of Hope's headquarters at Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield, Mo.

"Our goal is equitable access to aviation education for all students," said Tiffany Nelson, Wings of Hope Director of Programs and Evaluation.

SOAR into STEM addresses the industrywide shortage of pilots and mechanics, exposing students to the wide variety of aviation and STEM career paths through a free, 5-week, experience-based curriculum at the Wings of Hope hangar that culminates with students taking Young Eagle flights courtesy of the local chapter of the Experimental Aviation Association (EAA). To reach students with less access to STEM resources, the program also supports school outreach activities including field trips, classroom visits and attending community STEM events to involve and engage students in STEM fields. Wings of Hope offers additional opportunities for young people to gain exposure and experience in aviation careers by hosting student interns and summer camps.

Sister Gives Brother Raffle Prize!

Most people who purchase tickets to our biannual airplane raffles are hoping to win the grand prize: a plane. But a raffle ticket also buys a chance to win one of three additional prizes including a PPL (private pilot license) or advanced training scholarship.

Brother and sister, Peter Harvey and Andrea Kincade, have been buying tickets to the Wings of Hope airplane raffle for several years running.

"We've always toyed with the idea of buying an airplane," said Peter. "We both have property down south, and we thought it would be a great way to get to Florida or South Carolina."

Peter earned his private pilot license in 1993. Andrea has Ménière disease which impacts her balance and means getting a pilot's license is not in her future.

"Even if she wanted to get her license, she couldn't — so she decided that she wanted to participate in the raffle in the hopes that if she won, I would get a plane from her," said Peter.

They each buy three tickets to every raffle.

When Andrea won the \$5,000 scholarship this past spring, she asked if we would transfer the prize to her brother, Peter. We did, and now he is using it to sharpen his piloting skills.

"I got my pilot's license in 1993 and didn't get to fly as much as I had hoped due to business demands, the economy, a whole host of reasons," Peter said. "In 2018, I sold my company after 41 years and decided now I have the extra time and the extra cash to try and become a better pilot."

"This scholarship, for me, came along at a wonderful time. Obviously, financially it helps immensely — and it allows you to pursue training that you might not have had the opportunity to do," Peter said.

Peter flies once a week with a flight

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instructor at Griffing Flying Service in Port Clinton, Ohio.

"The training that I'm getting right now is approximately \$200 an hour — and if you buy in blocks of \$1,000, they give you a 10% discount. So that \$5,000 goes to quite a few hours. Really, it's great!" Peter said.

Even though Peter is current on his private pilot license, he believes "you can never have enough training."

"Having an instructor in the cockpit with you on the journey, I think is invaluable," he said.



Currently, Peter is working on getting proficient in VFR (visual flight rules) flying; next, he's planning on pursuing his IFR (instrument flight rules) rating.

He and his sister are still thinking about buying a plane — a Piper Saratoga six-seater. Until then, they will continue to take their chances buying tickets to the Wings of Hope airplane raffle.

"It's fun to participate in the raffle and realize it goes to a good cause — and you just never know? You could win."

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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