

Local Lady Flyer Making Her Mark in the Skies

By Cheryl Wooten

How far and how fast can three women in a single engine aircraft go in just four days? Valparaiso based pilot Keegan Starkey knows. Last June 20th, Keegan and co-pilot/teammate Audrey Rabe with Jodi Yoder, a Certified Flight Instructor, took off from Frederick, MD and raced for nearly 48 hours, ending up in Santa Fe, NM.

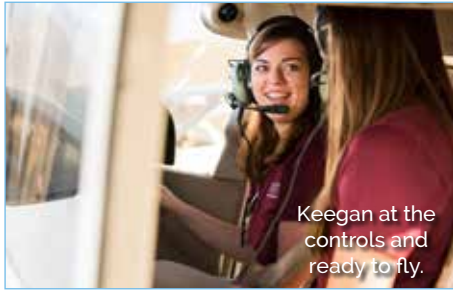
Keegan took part in the annual Air Race Classic, an all-woman race presenting pilots with challenges and learning opportunities. Keegan experienced changes in terrain, weather, winds and airspace as she flew over 2,600+ miles in four days. 54 planes participated in the race, each leaving 30 seconds apart. They traveled across 14 states, stopping at eight designated airstrips in Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Keegan and Audrey flew a Cessna Skyhawk Racer as part of the Liberty University Liberty Belles Team.

“The most challenging part was mountain flying,” says Keegan. “At Liberty in Virginia, we have small ranges, but no big mountains. Flying through the Rockies, we experienced high density altitude which meant it took longer than normal to take off. It made us a little nervous. It felt like we should be climbing faster. It’s a weird sensation when you’re not climbing quickly. We’re used to just shooting up like a rocket.”

Another new experience was how low they flew to the ground during their last leg from Texas to New Mexico. “When you’re flying east to west, the winds are coming from the west with the strongest headwinds at the highest altitudes. So, we flew about 500 feet off the ground that whole day. We flew safely, but normally, if we weren’t racing, we wouldn’t fly that low to the ground,” Keegan says.

From DeMotte, Keegan has been in flight training at the Eagle Aircraft Flight School in Valparaiso since June 2013. She passed her private pilot check ride the day she left for college. The following summer she finished her Instrument Rating in only 35.6 hours—35 hours is the FAA’s minimum. In the summer of 2015 she achieved her commercial rating, flying every day to complete the 120-hour requirement.

During her commercial rating training, Keegan flew many cross-country trips. One such trip included flying over the Virginia mountains for the first time and surprising her friends at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA. That same summer she also flew to Alaska to work on a Samaritan’s



Keegan at the controls and ready to fly.

Purse mission team from Liberty. Her church, American Reformed of DeMotte, helped fund her trip.

In the fall of 2016, she won a United Airlines Scholarship towards her degree and training and was invited to the Women in Aviation International Conference in Orlando, FL as a guest of United Airlines.

Keegan graduated this spring from Liberty University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aeronautics and a minor in Business, completing both in just three years. Keegan also received a scholarship from the Ninety-Nines, an all-female pilot organization of which she is a member.

She also received the Amelia Earhart Memorial Scholarship to pursue her Certified Flight Instructor Certificate (CFI). Keegan was accepted for an internship with United Airlines in Chicago and is working for Chief Pilot, Bo Ellis, until this December.

After United Airlines, Keegan will finish her Multi-Engine Training and work at Eagle Aircraft as a Flight Instructor, building hours to reach the 1,000-hour minimum through her degree at Liberty.

Keegan attributes these successes and opportunities to her faith in God, hard work, perseverance, her grandparents, John and Joy Slegers--who own the flight school--and her family and friends who have supported her along the way. She’s the first to say she couldn’t have done this on her own.

Keegan is the president of the Women in Aviation Chapter at Liberty University. She is the daughter of Jay and Holly Starkey of DeMotte, granddaughter of John and Joy Slegers of Valparaiso, Gene and the late Margot DeYoung of DeMotte, and Jim and Betty Starkey of Hebron.

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