

# Polk Pilots see the future in our youth

By: Sam Oleson

As commander of the U.S. Transportation Command, U.S. Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost is in charge of a lot of moving parts, from aircraft to airmen and everything in between. One of the parts she's always thinking about isn't necessarily one of logistics or strategy. It's the inspiration and education of potential future pilots, mechanics, and other aviation professionals — military or civilian.

Van Ovost and husband Alan Frosch, who manages Whitewater Aviation Corp. in Copperhill, Tennessee, visited EAA AirVenture Oshkosh 2022 with the goal of helping inspire and educate the next generation of pilots who will take the U.S. Air Force into its next 75 years.

"I think it's important to see what's possible earlier [in life]. It's not just one experience with these youth. It's the fol-



low-through," Van Ovost said. "How do we get some sort of aviation STEM course into high schools that provides a pathway into you getting your written [exam] done for your private pilot [certificate] or a pathway to getting your solo done so they can see themselves do that? That's absolutely the next step we need to take."

Van Ovost began her aviation journey early in life after her parents started

a fixed-based operation. Prior to attending the U.S. Air Force Academy, and later going on to U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, Van Ovost earned her private pilot certificate, and multiple ratings, while flying any way she could, from towing banners, to ultralights, to providing charter services through the family business. All told, she had about 1,000 hours prior to attending the Academy. But it all began like it did for so many

See page 5

continued from 1  
other pilots.

"I was sweeping the floors of the hangar, changing oil and filters [for the FBO]," she explained. "Doing some maintenance work and between all that, just getting enough money to get another flight. Refueling airplanes, cleaning windows. I had a little fuel truck. What became a 'Hey, pitch in' became a passion. It really became the foundation for what I wanted to do in the future."

Meanwhile, Frosch came into aviation by joining the Air Force during the Vietnam War, working on jet engines as a technician before becoming a flight engineer. In the 1990s, while at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama, Van Ovost enrolled Frosch in flight school (to meet her end of the deal he taught her to sail), and the two of them bought an airplane soon after he got his ticket.

One of the passions both Van Ovost and Frosch developed during her military service and his civilian aviation life is the promotion of aviation to youths who may not ever think about it as a potential career. The two of them use every opportunity toward the advancement of STEM education

school students in the area to come out to the airport and learn more about aviation and STEM opportunities.

"I try to get high school students out to teach them what's really out there," he said. "Some of them live up in the mountains and don't have much exposure to aviation or some of the opportunities available to them."

As part of Van Ovost's visit to AirVenture 2022, she took part in WomenVenture activities on Wednesday. As a high-ranking woman in the Air Force and someone who advanced through the ranks with few women surrounding her, Van Ovost knows the importance of encouraging women, as well as minorities, to consider aviation as a potential career path.

"This nation needs to remain on the competitive edge, and to do that, we need to excite everybody," she said. "It's important that you don't leave talent on the table. You can't be what you can't see. ... It's really important to have females and those from all diverse backgrounds and ethnicities become flight instructors, CEOs, and maintenance officers to show that you can do this. I've had the chance to talk to folks at Women-

"Just one person, one event, one inspiration, one mentorship," she continued. "A mentor will keep you going. It's clearly not easy what we do. I've been there; I've tilled it. Mentors have helped me recognize that I should get up. I can do it; I've done it before. If you match your passion to your talent, you won't work a day in your life. It doesn't mean you won't fail at something. ... How do we instill that 'go get it' in them?"

When it comes to mentorship, Van Ovost talked about three different phases that everyone should consider — all important steps in inspiring and encouraging the next generation.

"The most important people in my life are those that went before me, those that opened the doors. Eileen Collins, who was the second female test pilot, I looked up to her. The Women Airforce Service Pilots, the Tuskegee Airmen — they showed us what could be; they broke ceilings. Those who went beside me are the next person. Those that encourage you along the way and see you stumble along the way, but help you. Then there are those that are behind you that are looking up to you. The ones that want a hand up, and not a hand out. They're depend-

for the next generation and underserved communities. In his position at Martin Campbell Field, Frosch encourages high

Venture, and we can't just expose it to them once today. I challenged them to be the one to continue to reach out.

ing on you to keep going. ... You're all three of those people, but you've got to take action."