

# Women in Aviation Conference: Atlanta, 2009

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Check your egos at the door. The normally competitive, best-of-the-best mindset that prevails in the male-dominated world of aviation is set aside when walking through the doors of a Women in Aviation International (WAI) Conference. Words like camaraderie, mentorship, inspiration, scholarship and friendship become the norm.

The 20th Annual WAI Conference (held in Atlanta, Georgia Feb 26 – 28) was themed, “A New Approach for Your Tomorrow.” The conference goal is to help today’s aviation hopefuls pave their way into the future and to present aviation as a prime pathway to the future, for those who are not yet sure where their futures are headed.

The first conference (held in Prescott, Arizona in conjunction with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) was the brain-child of Dr. Peggy Chabrian, WAI’s President. The conference was designed to showcase aviation as a career choice for females. Men were also welcomed and encouraged to attend the conference. That conference, in March 1990, saw the likes of Jeanna Yeager, Dr. Shannon Lucid and Bobbi Trout speaking to the 150 women and men attending.

Attendance this year was near the 3,000 mark, with women and men attending this year’s WAI conference for the same reason those first 150 did: a passion for all things aviation.

Diversity is one of the key ingredients at a WAI Conference. WAI spans the whole spectrum of aviation. General aviation, commercial aviation, military aviation, NASA, FAA, cargo, airlines, pilots, Air Traffic Control, mechanics; chances are every aspect of aviation will be found at the conference.

The tentative economy has touched the conference negatively on some levels. Last year 148 companies were present as exhibitors; this year the count was 125. In a cost-saving move, some vendors also cut down on exhibit space. Freebies still flowed freely though, with only a small decline in the amount of goodies available.

Another area touched by the faltering economy is hiring. In years past, substantial hiring was done on the spot at WAI. This year, the majority of companies (like Alaska Airlines, Delta Airlines, Mesaba Airlines and UPS) were not hiring pilots, though some have openings in other areas. Others (like American Airlines and Horizon Air) are looking to call back furloughed workers first. A few (like Cape Air) had a rosier picture and were taking resumes for pilots and other positions.

One aspect that has not declined with the economy is generosity: Sponsorships are up. Sponsorship of the many educational sessions, workshops, the Internet Café, and more helps keep admission to the conference affordable. The special event Friday night at the Georgia Aquarium was sponsored by Air Tran; Friday’s luncheon was sponsored by Delta; and the Saturday banquet was sponsored by UPS -- these are yet another part of the story. Even the WAI 20th Anniversary book given to attendees has a sponsor – Boeing -- which has been side by side with WAI all through the past 20 years.

Scholarship awards are also an important feature of the conference, with nearly \$460,000 worth presented this year. The total awarded was actually down from 2008, but the financial help is always significant to recipients, no matter the amount. The scholarships, available to members only, can range from \$500 for adding a rating, to books, to type ratings in commercial jet liners.



WASP Dawn Seymour and Ambassador Jamail Larkins listen to breakfast speaker

One guarantee at a WAI Conference, no matter what the economy, is the warmth, friendship, and knowledge that are so freely shared. Educational sessions run Friday and Saturday with topics ranging from Night Flying, Owner Maintenance, Airspace Redesign, Identity Theft (and how to avoid it), Corporate Careers, WASP Tales, Writing Press Releases, Military Careers, Space Transportation and even “Starting a Women in Aviation Chapter.”

The General Sessions showcased movers and shakers in aviation and even a political figure. On Friday, WAI was treated to Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue. Perdue holds a single and multi-engine commercial fixed wing pilot rating and recently completed his helicopter rating. Perdue proudly informed the WAI audience “there are over 500 aeronautical companies in Georgia.” Doug Hinzie, President of Chevron Global Aviation, spoke. Corkey Fornof, stunt pilot, aerial coordinator and movie director, traded flying stories with Patty Wagstaff, airshow performer, International aerobatic champion and the first woman to win the US aerobatic championship.



Governor Perdue, Pilot

Rounding out Friday’s speakers was Jessica Cox [whose story broke internationally in 121five.com, by the



Aerobatic champion Patty Wagstaff (L) and new Sport Pilot Jessica Cox

way], who recently earned her Sport Pilot rating in an Ercoupe. This may seem unremarkable, but Cox, born without arms, flies with her feet! Cox initially planned to take a flight to conquer her fear of flying but once she got airborne, she was bitten by the aviation bug. Says Cox “You have a little taste of it and the first time I flew, I thought ‘Wow, this is awesome!’” She adds, “I didn’t have enough.” She is planning to obtain her Sport Pilot Instructor rating and move on from there.

Saturday’s General Session started with Dr. Peggy Chabrian thanking the volunteers, staff and sponsors for their contributions. Each contribution is critical to the continued success of WAI.

Leading off the speakers was Jeff Deckelbaum, Vice President of Product Support for Integrated Defense Systems and Vice President of Engineering for Global Services and Support for Boeing Company. Victoria Cox, Air Traffic Operations Senior Vice President and Senior Vice President of NextGen and Operations Planning, FAA, spoke about a subject near and dear to most pilots’ heart – the Next Generation Air Transportation System. Cox admits “the current system is not always performing adequately.” She points mostly to isolated and very congested areas, opposites with opposite problems, both of which will be helped by NextGen. The FAA plans to transform the entire system. [See the NextGen white paper in the Features section here at 121five.com.]

Astronaut and first female International Space Station (ISS) Commander Peggy Whitson showed a presentation about life on the ISS. Among her insights was the fact that along with the mission objectives and taking care of



Craig Fuller and happy new Archer pilot Karoline Amodeo



Drs Peggy: Whitson (astronaut, L) and Chabrian (WIA Chair) in the General Session

voices are heard” on aviation issues affecting you. Fuller surprised WAI attendee Karoline Amodeo when he announced her as the winner of the Piper Archer in AOPA’s Get Your Glass Sweepstakes.

A new addition to the exhibitors this year was EAA Timeless Voices of Aviation. Zack Baughman, coordinator, was on hand, recording first-hand video accounts of anyone in aviation with a story to tell. Says Baughman on the experience, “As a first-timer to a Women in Aviation Conference, I was blown away by the energy and excitement at the event.” Baughman was equally positive about the interviews: “In just three short days of the conference I recorded 17 new Timeless Voices interviews. Every single person I interviewed had a fantastic story to tell – I know I was inspired. I look forward to sharing those stories through the Timeless Voices program where they can educate and inspire others.”

Closing the conference on Saturday evening is the WAI Pioneer Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. This year’s inductees were aviation record holder Jacqueline Cochran (May 1908? – Aug. 1980), WAVE Patricia Malone (July 1924- Aug 2008), aviation pioneer Ruth Nichols (Feb. 1901 – Sept. 1960), WASP Dawn Seymour (July 1917 - ) who attended the conference and WW2 Soviet combat pilot Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova (Sep. 1918 - ).

Mark your calendars for the 21st WAI Conference, to be held in Orlando, Florida February 25 – 27 2010. Can’t make the conference? Not to worry: the WAI Organization has a special members’-only job area and a mentor area on its website. The willingness to mentor and help doesn’t end after the conference; the members are there the other 362 days as well!



Wanna Race?  
There’s something for everybody!

the unforeseen emergencies that happen, a high priority is given to cleanliness on board the ISS. For example, during haircuts, it is imperative to vacuum up the loose hair as it is cut, because, as Whitson says, “We’d be coughing up fur balls if we didn’t.”

Elissa Lines, Vice President of Donor and Business Relations from the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) spoke about the success of Women Venture at the 2008 Air Venture and the plans for 2009. James Love, Acting Director of Military Equal Opportunity, Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity at the Department of Defense, gave his pitch about employment at the DoD.

Craig Fuller, new President and CEO of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) encouraged participants to “make sure your

#### More:

- [www.wai.org](http://www.wai.org);
- [www.erau.edu](http://www.erau.edu);
- [http://www.deltajobs.net/career\\_destinations.htm](http://www.deltajobs.net/career_destinations.htm);
- [http://www.airtran.com/Jobs/employment\\_opportunities.aspx](http://www.airtran.com/Jobs/employment_opportunities.aspx);
- <https://ups.managehr.com/index.html>;
- <https://jobs.boeing.com/JobSeeker/JobSearch?visited=true>;
- <http://www.chevron-globalaviation.com/default.asp>;
- <http://www.pattywagstaff.com>;
- <http://www.corkeyfornof.com>;
- <http://www.rightfooted.com>;
- <http://www.faa.gov/jobs>;
- <http://nasajobs.nasa.gov>;
- [www.eaa.org](http://www.eaa.org);
- [www.timelessvoices.org](http://www.timelessvoices.org);
- <http://www.aopa.org>