April 2026

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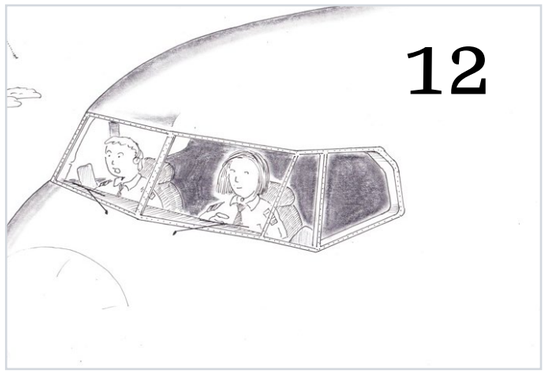


SouthWings
CONSERVATION THROUGH AVIATION

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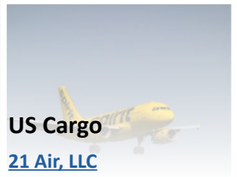
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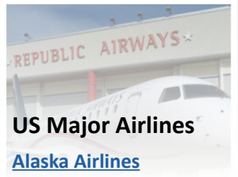
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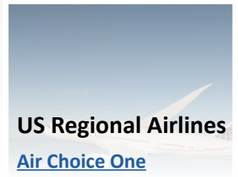
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Empire Airlines

The Grid (contract comparisons, pay charts, company details, etc.) has moved online. Click on the airlines above to go directly to that airline’s information, or go to www. AeroCrewNews.com/go/thegrid.

Dear readers,

As a fellow airline pilot, I am saddened by the news of the devastating accident on March 22. On behalf of myself and everyone at Aero Crew News, we send our deepest condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of Captain Antoine Forest and First Officer Mackenzie Gunther. Having been around and in aviation my whole life, I've experienced this kind of loss firsthand. We will continue to keep them all in our hearts, minds and in our prayers.

"To fly west, my friend, is a flight we all must take for a final check."
– Author unknown

As the NTSB investigation continues, Aero Crew News will continue to bring you updates as we receive them. May this tragic accident bring enlightenment and innovation that will make the future safer for all.



Fly Safe,

Craig D. Pieper

Craig D. Pieper

About the Publisher



Craig Pieper is the Publisher and Founder of Aero Crew News. Craig obtained his Bachelors of Science in Aeronautical Science, along with a minor in Aviation Weather, from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in 2001. Craig is also a captain for a major airline with a type rating in the Boeing 737 & Embraer 145 and has logged over 10,000 hours of flying time since his introductory flight on November 14th, 1992.

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March 2026

Feature – Get thee to WEE by way of HAM. (Don't look up WEE, read the piece!)

Baggage – In part 2, learn more about managing ADHD without the meds.

Business Vector – This piece explains the data that supports personnel demand.

Coffee & Pretzels – What about the married ones?

Desk One – In this first installment of a new column dedicated to better understanding the dispatch system, a contradiction with weather is explained.

Fitness – Make the most of even the worst hotel gyms.

Grey Matter – The final in a four-part series on passenger announcements proffers sage counsel in contrast to some poor, some funny PA choices.

Knowledge Base – The complexities of the system of runway safety lights are explained.

Money – Learn to play catch-up in your 401(k) and/or Roth—by the easy rules.

Mortgage – Is 2026 shaping up to deliver house-buying or refi opportunities in your favor?

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SkyLaw – What do you need to know about antidepressants and your medical certification?

Squall Line – Is there a legit defense of those TAFs that drive you nuts?



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United Reaches New Agreement with Association of Flight Attendants

United Airlines and the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA announced a new tentative agreement that if ratified will provide industry-leading wages, better scheduling and other improvements for United's 30,000 flight attendants.
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Illinois Senators Push FAA to Prioritize ORD for Staffing and Modernization

Illinois Senators Richard J. Durbin and Tammy Duckworth have called on Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator Bryan Bedford to increase investment, staffing, and modernization efforts at Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD). Read More



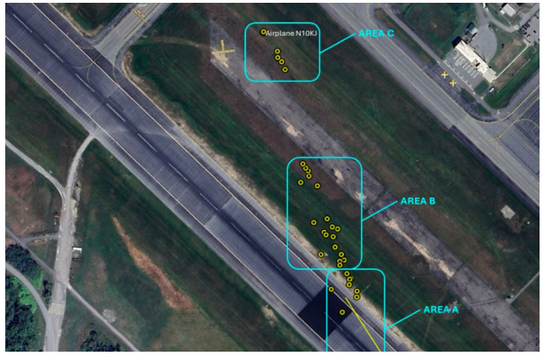
Bringing Them Home: ALPA Honors the Crew of Jazz Flight 8646

Hundreds of uniformed pilots showed up to Newark, Ottawa, and Montréal airports to pay their respects to Captain Antoine Forest and First Officer Mackenzie Gunther, the pilots of Jazz Aviation Flight 8646, on their final flights home. Read More



ALPA Calls on Congress to Pay TSA Workers Before Leaving Town

Capt. Jason Ambrosi, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), issued the following statement calling on Congress to act immediately and pay Transportation Security Administration (TSA) transportation security officers (TSOs) before departing for spring recess, as thousands of these aviation security workers... Read More



The NTSB has released it's preliminary report on the fatal crash in Bangor, Maine

On January 25, 2026, at 1944 EST, Bombardier Challenger 650 N10KJ crashed shortly after takeoff from runway 33 at Bangor International Airport, Bangor, Maine, during a Part 91 business flight, fatally injuring the pilot... Read More



Message from United CEO Scott Kirby to Employees: 'We're Ready, We Have a Plan and We're Going to Continue Executing That Plan'

Team: We're hosting an event at LAX next week for reporters where we'll announce the next phase of our decade-long investment in aircraft and product to build the #1 brand-loyal airline in the world. Read More



JetBlue Pilots Sue to Force Company to Fully Arbitrate Job Security Guarantees Impacted by Blue Sky Partnership with United Airlines

JetBlue Pilots, represented by the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), filed a lawsuit against JetBlue Airways in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York after management... Read More



Air Transport International Pilots Ratify Tentative Agreement

Air Transport International (ATI) pilots, represented by the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), voted to ratify a Tentative Agreement worth $114 million in increased value to the pilot group. The agreement comes after almost six years of bargaining. Read More



Spirit Airlines Announces Restructuring Support Agreement and Plan of Reorganization

Spirit Aviation Holdings, Inc., parent company of Spirit Airlines, LLC (together, "Spirit" or the "Company"), announced that [Friday March 13, it filed] a Restructuring Support Agreement (the "RSA") and Plan of Reorganization (the "Plan") with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of New York (the "Court"). Read More



JetBlue Grows Fort Lauderdale Network with New Route and More Flights

JetBlue, Fort Lauderdale's leading airline, announced continued expansion at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) with new service to Cleveland, Ohio (CLE), and increased flying across nine popular existing routes. Read More



Atlas Air Worldwide Places Landmark Order for 20 Airbus A350F Aircraft

Atlas Air Worldwide Holdings, Inc. announced a firm order for 20 Airbus A350F freighters, with options for an additional 20 aircraft, making Atlas the largest customer for the all-new large widebody freighter platform and securing... Read More



ALPA Statement on ALERT Act

Capt. Jason Ambrosi, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), issued the following statement after the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee announced it will consider revised aviation safety legislation in response to the tragic accident involving PSA Airlines Flight 5342. Read More

AVIATOR BULLETINS



United to Add 250+ Planes in Next Two Years – Most by Any Airline – Includes New, Premium Customer Experiences

United Airlines announced the next phase of its long-term plan to win brand loyal customers and further differentiate itself from competitors. Read More



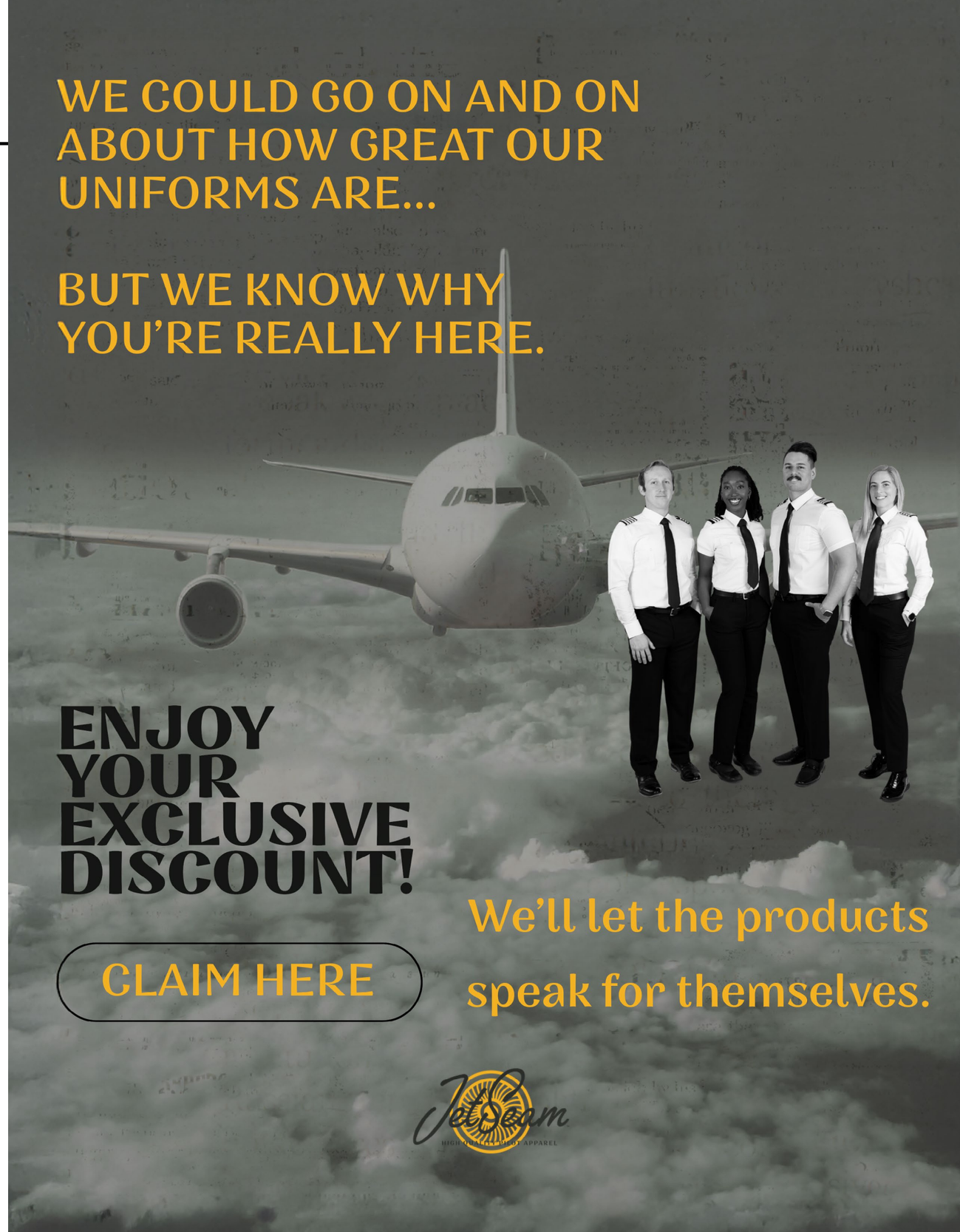
PSA Airlines celebrates grand opening of Charlotte headquarters

PSA Airlines celebrated the ceremonial grand opening of its new corporate headquarters in Charlotte, which opened to more than 450 team members in January following the company's relocation from Dayton, Ohio. The event brought together state and local officials, education partners and PSA Airlines and other... Read More



ALPA Welcomes New FAA Safety Move; Urges Congress to Mandate Collision-Warning Technology

Capt. Jason Ambrosi, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA), issued the following statement after the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced new measures to... Read More

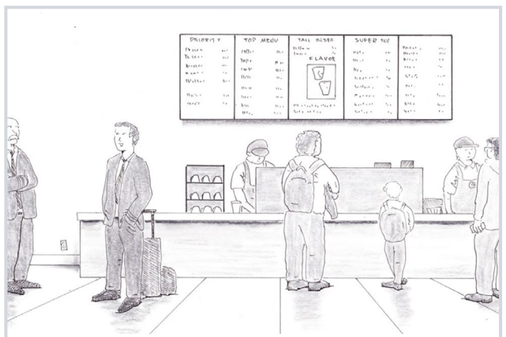


coffee & pretzels

Greg Kaley



I'm slowly realizing that going from an intro flight in a Cessna to a job with a major airline in five years was possibly based more on astonishing timing than my intellect, personality, and flying skills.



Check Out Last Month's Cartoon



About the Author

Greg Kaley is a pilot with a major airline who also happens to be a cartoonist. He started the cartoon "Coffee & Pretzels" in 2016. After graduating from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Prescott Campus), he flight-instructed and subsequently... Read More...



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Creating a Crew in the Training Environment

Written by: John McDermott

Over the years of my flight training, I have heard of various ways that different operators make sure their pilots can work effectively as a crew. Some, for example, limit the types of conversations that go on in the cockpit to prevent personal conflict from bleeding into professional duties. Oftentimes, crews make a point of spending time together outside of work as well: they buy dinner or get drinks to spend time getting to know each other and building camaraderie.

I find it essential to take similar steps in my job as a flight instructor. Over 18 months working in Central Florida, I had the opportunity to train many wonderful students. These students occupied each point of political, social, and religious spectrums. Some were incredibly wealthy while others could only afford one or two flights per month; many shared their strong opinions, positive or negative, about prominent elected officials and their decisions.

To provide effective training, and to ensure that my students and I trusted each other to communicate effectively about our performance and each real-life situation, I had to make sure I was relating to each student.

This often entailed taking the time to get to know each one on a personal level. If I don't hear about their university studies or day jobs, I must make a point to ask; I am equally interested in family lives, aviation goals, and even favorite teams. By building strong personal foundations with students, we have a base level of trust that allows us to be open and honest with each other. It also allows instructor and student to work together as a strong team in situations that, to ensure safety of flight, we must operate more as a crew then instructor/student.

Equally, I have taught myself to be neutral on a number of key points regarding current events. Intentionally, I do not share political leanings. When students ask about major accidents or incidents, I focus on objective fact instead of speculating in ways that may alienate students in one way or another.

This is a topic I go over with flight instructor applicants, particularly those who plan to work in the aviation industry long term. Flight instructors must discuss risk management, and I encourage these instructors-to-be to consider how to approach each student in a way that allows for trust and transparency.

As with my students, I consider how to make myself a "crew" with fellow flight instructors. As we look to each other for support—ask clarifying questions, request mock checkrides, and transfer long term students—we must be comfortable enough to trust each other's skills and training. The better I know my coworkers and their relationships with their students, the more easily I can offer assistance. For example, if they need a student covered for a weekend, I will be able to focus on precisely what their students need at each stage. Conversely, the better my coworkers know me, the more I can trust that they, for example, will conduct mock checkrides with focus on the particular areas I prefer.

Strong connections even come in handy when I need flight reviews or instrument proficiency checks, as strong relationships make it that much easier to coordinate.

In every capacity, I find it helpful to handle myself in a way that builds trust between myself and both my students and coworkers. With a baseline of trust, I find the training environment to have a greater likelihood of success: not only with checkride passes but also by creating strong safety habits that will endure through the years to come.



About the Author

John McDermott's passion for aviation began in a Michigan bookstore when he found a story about a chance encounter between enemy pilots during World War II. Soon, after watching countless hours of fighter jets and traffic from his home near O'Hare International Airport, he was hooked forever.. Read More...



Phones on Planes, Part 2

Still worse than snakes on planes

Written by: Richard Swindell

Another circuit around the sun has occurred since we published an article about the history and issues regarding cell phones on airliners. (See Grey Matter, May 2025.) Based on an actual, recent event, we thought you might be interested in a part two of *Phones on Planes: Worse Than Snakes on Planes*...

I was operating to Paris a few weeks ago out of Newark, and shortly after takeoff the lead flight attendant (FA) rang the flight deck to report a passenger who was refusing to end a phone call. I was of course immediately surprised because our airborne WiFi is so bad you can barely send a text or email, much less carry on an actual phone call; yet I quickly moved to the issue at hand, which was not the call itself (we'll get to that in a moment), but the act of non-compliance. The FA had asked the passenger to stop, but the passenger did not. Further, the FA reported that the passenger not only repeatedly refused to end the call but also demanded proof that the call was "illegal," additionally requesting that the flight's captain deliver this information personally. I really wonder sometimes if people just seek out conflict for conflict's sake. As I pondered this, the FA was waiting on the other end for a response from the flight deck.

And here it is:

> First, pilots do not leave the flight deck once airborne to address passengers' concerns or demands—this is what the PA system and law enforcement are for.
>
> Second, refusing to comply with a crewmember's instructions and interfering with their duties is a federal crime.
>
> Third, neither this airline, nor the FAA and FCC have authorized in-flight phone calls; thus, having one while flying on an airliner remains a violation of federal law.
>
> Continued refusal to comply will result in law enforcement meeting the aircraft upon landing—either in Paris or in Newark should we have to go back.
>
> Do not make me turn this plane around.

FAs are typically very good at deescalating conflict, and although this was an unusual event, they were ultimately successful at resolving it, and we landed in Paris about six hours later without any further issues. However, the lead FA did follow-up and ask if there were, in fact, specific regulations that cover points two and three above. I said indeed there are, and I wrote them out just in case she ever has a non-compliant jerk of a passenger demand to know what laws they're breaking. And now, I'll write them out for you here, starting with the set that could land one in federal prison for up to 20-years:

> Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Part 121.580, FAR Part 91.11, and Title 49 United States Code (USC) 46504 all state that it is a federal crime to assault, threaten, intimidate, and interfere with flight crew duties, as well as hinder, disrupt, or fail to follow crewmembers' instructions.

Example:

> FA: "Please discontinue your call and turn your phone off."
>
> Passenger: "No."

Please standby to explain your response to the police because this is interfering with the duties of a flight crewmember and blatant non-compliance.

A side note about non-compliance while we're here: the industry considers a passenger's refusal to comply with crewmember instructions (regardless of how minor the infraction or inconvenience the passenger thinks it is) as a potential threat to the safe operation of the flight. If you refuse to turn

your phone off or take your seat and buckle your seat belt, what other rules might you decide do not apply to you? So, flight crew care about these things, and so do cops, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and potentially North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), along with the White House.

Returning to the title of this article though and with specific regard to the regulations impeding your ability to make phone calls while on an airliner in flight, these are:

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Title 47 CFR 22.925 as well as Part 22 of the Commission's Rules, in addition to Title 49 USC 41725 (The FAA Reauthorization Act, 2018), and FAR Title 14 Part 91.21.

Here's a snapshot of this regulatory language:

- The Secretary of Transportation shall issue regulations to prohibit an individual on an aircraft from engaging in voice communications using a mobile communications device during a flight of that aircraft in scheduled passenger interstate or intrastate air transportation.

- Further: Cellular telephones installed in or carried aboard airplanes must not be operated while such aircraft are airborne.

- And: No person may operate, nor may any operator or pilot in command of an aircraft allow the operation of, any portable electronic device on an aircraft operated by a holder of an air carrier operating certificate.

There. Presently, it remains illegal. Full stop.

Although we covered this last year, it is worth restating here: a switched-on cell phone or a cabin full of switched-on cell phones will not bring down an airliner. However, having them turned off does prevent significant disruption to safety briefings and demonstrations along with the massive potential for air rage and in-cabin conflict—the problematic magnitude of which cannot be overstated.

Planes are one of the last few places where you can escape the blare, bleep, and bother of everyone incessantly engaging with their phones—and I hope, in the skies at least, we are able to keep it that way.

So, if you don't have the right to talk on your phone or ignore flight crewmember instructions, what rights do you have on airliners? Well, we'll address the Airline Passenger's Bill of Rights next month and talk about that.

Thanks for reading—and for not talking on your phone in flight.



About the Author

Richard Swindell left active-duty military service and transitioned to the airline industry where he flies and works as a line check airman for a major airline. Read More...





Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs)

Written by: Sergio Sovero

The National Airspace System (NAS) includes Special Use Airspace to restrict or regulate civilian operations in sensitive areas. While many of these areas are permanent, Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) may be established at any time by the FAA through the NOTAM system. The modern use of TFRs expanded significantly following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. As a result, prior to flight, pilots are required to review all applicable NOTAMs to avoid inadvertent entry into restricted airspace.

NOTAMs associated with TFRs provide critical information, including geographic boundaries, effective times, altitude limits, and operational restrictions for aircraft operating in or near the affected area.

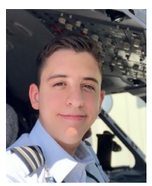
A common example is the VIP TFR, which is implemented when government officials, such as the president or vice president, are traveling. These TFRs typically consist of one or more concentric rings of airspace that become active for defined periods. Violations can result in significant enforcement action and may prompt a response from the Department of Defense, including the interception of the violating aircraft. Because VIP TFRs can be issued or modified with little notice, it is essential to review FDC NOTAMs before every flight, including routine operations near home airports.

TFRs may also be issued for major sporting events. The FAA determines when such restrictions are necessary to protect persons and property on the ground. Under current regulations, the “stadium TFR” prohibits aircraft and parachute operations at or below 3,000 feet AGL within a 3 NM radius of qualifying venues (with a capacity of 30,000 or more) during events such as Major League Baseball games, NFL games, NCAA Division I football games, and major motor speedway events. These restrictions are in effect nationwide and apply from one hour before the scheduled start time until one hour after the event concludes.

Additionally, TFRs may be established in response to disasters or hazards. A notable example occurred following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when widespread flooding, infrastructure damage, and communication failures created a highly complex operating environment along the Gulf Coast, particularly in the New Orleans area. The FAA implemented a large-scale TFR to support emergency response efforts. The primary objective was to create a controlled airspace environment that allowed military, law enforcement, medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), and humanitarian relief flights to operate safely and efficiently without interference from non-essential air traffic. By restricting access, the FAA ensured safe airspace deconfliction for the high volume of low-altitude rescue, transport, and supply operations, while also addressing security concerns in an unstable post-disaster environment.

If a pilot is intercepted by a military aircraft for a TFR violation, the intercepting aircraft will attempt to identify the intruder and establish communication via radio or visual signals, such as rocking wings. Once contact is established, the pilot will be instructed to follow the intercepting aircraft out of the restricted area. Compliance is critical. Enforcement actions are determined by the FAA based on investigations conducted in coordination with the TSA, with potential outcomes including fines, certificate suspension, or revocation.

TFR violations have decreased over time due to improved pilot education and awareness. However, TFRs remain dynamic in nature—particularly VIP TFRs, which may be activated, extended, or canceled with minimal notice. Pilots should plan accordingly, especially when operating near an airport shortly after a TFR is scheduled to expire, as delays, airborne holding, or diversion may be required.



About the Author

Sergio Sovero was born and raised in Lima, Peru, and is currently a captain for Delta Air Lines. Read More...



PRODUCT REVIEW

Clean Up Your Cockpit

Written By: Craig Pieper, Publisher

Photo courtesy of Clean Up Your Cockpit.

It never occurred to me that I needed a new way to secure my Bose Control Module in the aircraft until I found *Clean Up Your Cockpit*. I first learned of the product from my first officer who had one. After seeing it, I just had to have one, too. Later that very evening, I found the creator's website, https://cleanupyourcockpit.com and I contacted the company's owner.

Within a week or so, I received my control module holder, and honestly, I don't know how I lived without it. For $25 dollars you can have one for your headset too. These are durable and completely functional. They are manufactured using four 3-D printers to keep up with the growing demand. Your holder will come with a lifetime guarantee, too.

Clean Up Your Cockpit for the B737 fits a variety of different headsets: U Fly Quiet UFQ, Bose A20/A30 and Pro Flight, David Clark One-X, DC Pro-X, Clarity Aloft, Lightspeed Delta Zulu, Zulu and UFlyMike Harmony. Currently they have specific fits for aircraft with a visor rail such as the Boeing 737, LearJet Dash 8 and more, along with the CRJ and others. They also offer a tube mount for aircraft with an exposed frame like the Piper Cub. There are also universal fit options that can be mounted to a flat surface or a RAM suction cup. There may other sources for different aircraft, but you'll just have to search for them. Maybe you'll see them covered in future product reviews.

For mine, I elected the option to customize it with my name, base and phone number so that it could be returned to me in the event I should forget to take it or lose it. To further help me remember to take it, I ordered the neon orange, but they have more than 20 different colors from which to choose.

The owner of *Clean Up Your Cockpit* has even created some helpful videos showing you how to install the holder and your control module so you don't break it on install. Check out the videos below: https://cleanupyourcockpit.com/pages/install-videos

Some of the control module holders also contain options for different hook sizes, the ability to have separate hooks and make them different colors. Be sure to read all the notes for the specific holder that you are ordering.

Bottom line: I heartily endorse this product. It is well made, has a full warranty, is durable and does what intended. Go ahead, make your captain or first office envious when they see you use *Clean Up Your Cockpit* to do just that.



About the Publisher

Craig Pieper is the Publisher and Founder of Aero Crew News. Craig obtained his Bachelors of Science in Aeronautical Science, along with a minor in Aviation Weather, from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in 2001. Craig is also a captain for a major airline with a...Read More



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SKYWATCH

Spring Stargazing

From the flight deck or your own backyard, there are wonders to behold in the dark skies of the season.

Written By: Howard Parkin. MBE BSc, BEd, FRAS

Spring in the northern hemisphere is a great time for stargazing. The spring night sky is sometimes called the "quieter sky," because after the magnificent displays of the cold season, there are fewer bright stars than we saw in the winter. However, most of the winter stars are still going to be visible in the west after sunset. So, do take this last opportunity to look at the stars of Orion and the rest of the winter hexagon and the stars that have been dominating our night skies over the last few months. This will be the last chance for these until the early hours of the autumnal mornings.

The planet Jupiter is still unmistakable in the constellation Gemini in the spring night sky and is best seen in the southern or western sky depending on what time you are observing. Once the sky darkens in early April, if you look straight up through your aircraft's eyebrow windows, you will see Jupiter overhead.

Jupiter is very bright, and even a small pair of binoculars will clearly show it to be a disc rather than a point of light. As the biggest planet in our solar system—at over 80 times the size of Earth—it is very easy to see. It is currently in the constellation Gemini, the twins. Incidentally, Jupiter has been going backwards in the sky (from east to west) for some time now, due to the phenomenon known as "retrograde motion." Over a thousand years ago, this caused ancient astronomers some grief as they struggled to understand how this could occur. Jupiter has regained positive, or direct motion, after March 13 so all is well again in the cosmos! Look closely and you will note that Jupiter is again closing in on the twin stars of Gemini—Castor and Pollux. Once the sky darkens in early April, if you look straight up through your aircraft's eyebrow windows, you will see Jupiter overhead with Castor and Pollux below to the right.

For more of a challenge, try to spot Venus. Following its conjunction with the Sun back in January, Venus may just be glimpsed in the evening sky very low on the western horizon, but only in a very light sky. It sets not long after sunset. Venus will slowly draw away from the Sun but at a very low angle so it will be difficult to see. It sets just over an hour after sunset in early April, but about two hours after sunset by the end of the month. However, by the time we get to May and June, Venus and Jupiter will both be visible in a darker sky very close to each other. The distance will be just over a full-moon angular diameter.

Looking at the stars, waiting until mid-April onwards, the Milky Way will be easily seen from any dark location. It stretches across the sky from the northern to southern horizons. This is one of the best times of the year to see the Milky Way as the longer hours of the spring skies—compared with summer's—gives us longer to look at all the stars of the Milky Way. Incidentally, it's useful to be reminded that apart from a handful of galaxies (M31, M33, and the two Magellanic Clouds specifically) everything we see in the sky is in the Milky Way.

Despite the high altitude at which most aircraft fly, the stars always twinkle; or to use the correct astronomical term "scintillate," However, planets like Jupiter shine with a steady glow. It all comes down to atmospheric refraction. Stars are so far away that despite their brightness, they are only single points of light. But planets despite being "starlike" in their appearance, are small discs and so their reflected sun light does not twinkle. Some time ago, I was talking to a NASA Shuttle astronaut, and they commented about seeing the stars shining steadily from orbit. They remarked that it was beautiful but a little disconcerting.

Along with Jupiter, the bright winter stars are now slowly setting into the western sky, and the spring constellations of Leo and Virgo are now visible in the southern and eastern sky. A quick glance will show far fewer bright stars compared to the profusion of bright stars in winter. The only stars in the top 30 of brightest stars seen in spring, are Regulus in Leo, Spica in Virgo and Arcturus in Bootes. Regulus and Spica sit almost exactly upon Ecliptic and consequently can be occulted by the Moon, or rarely by a planet. The Big dipper is standing on its tail in April as it rotates around the northern celestial pole and Polaris. If you follow the handle of this asterism down towards the eastern sky, you will come to Arcturus, the fourth brightest star in the night sky

The Lyrids meteor shower will be seen around April 22, in the northeastern sky. With a new Moon on April 17, this means we will have moonless skies offering a good chance we will see some bright, fast meteors in the night skies.

I'll be back with more as we welcome summer. Meanwhile, enjoy our dark skies and happy stargazing from the flight deck and from your own backyard.



About the Author

Inspired by the space race in the 1960s, **Howard Parkin** has been an enthusiastic astronomer since childhood and has become an accomplished and entertaining speaker on the subject throughout the... Read More...

DESK ONE



Boeing 737 Lost Communications: Dispatcher and Crew Coordination

Written By: Laura Laster

A recent NASA ASRS CALLBACK featured a phenomenal example of coordination between the aircraft dispatcher and a flight crew on a high workload, short leg flight. Both pilots and aircraft dispatchers are expected to know the rules if a flight under IFR loses communication, but few of us have dealt with such a scenario. The report explained how the moment the main wheels of the Boeing 737 lifted off, an excruciating squeal came through the radios and intercom system.

This squeal was so loud, the captain and first officer could not communicate with each other on their intercom or with ATC! Using hand signals, they continued the climb. Troubleshooting began at a safe altitude, but absolutely nothing fixed the horrendous squeal. The crew continued with the filed flight plan, climbing to FL280 while squawking 7600 on the transponder to notify ATC.

During the climb, the crew contacted their dispatcher through ACARS requesting the dispatcher coordinate with ATC. The dispatcher did this, ensuring ATC knew the flight was continuing to FL280. The flight's dispatcher continued as the "ATC relay" and passed along the descent clearance, altitude assignments, and even the clearance to fly the approach. This culminated with dispatch speaking to the tower controller and relaying the landing clearance to the flight crew, all over ACARS.

Amidst all this, the crew had to open the flight deck door to explain to the flight attendants the interphone issues, as this was also affected. The flight crew worked out a signal with the flight attendants to secure the cabin and communicate with chimes once the cabin was secured for landing.

The landing was uneventful, and once off the runway, the captain called the tower controller on his cell phone. This was the first time the flight's crew had been able to verbally communicate with anyone on the ground since departure! The tower controller gave the flight crew their taxi clearance to the gate.

What is phenomenal about this story is how the crew and dispatcher worked together and used all available resources to ensure communications were maintained on this highly unusual communications problem. The aircraft was not equipped with HF or SATCOM, only VHF and ACARS. That meant when VHF was unusable, the crew followed the IFR process for lost communications while using their one remaining way to communicate: ACARS and their dispatcher.

The dispatcher in this case became crucial to the flight's communications. Without the dispatcher speaking to ATC and relaying clearances, this could have escalated to a NORDO (no radio) security event involving scrambling escort aircraft. The ability of the dispatcher to coordinate with the crew and ATC contributed essential elements to ensure a safe outcome. This flight is also a fantastic reminder of why IFR lost-communication protocols are important to understand and benefit from periodic review.

When we relegate lost-communication procedures to "something to be learned to pass a checkride," we may not recall them when they're most needed! If we relegate the dispatcher to "the fuel gatekeeper" or "the weather monitor" or "the MEL coordinator," we may not consider the dispatcher's other abilities to help when it matters most. The adage of "aviate, navigate, communicate" played out perfectly in this crew's experience. On this day, however, the dispatcher's role was elevated far beyond the typical operational control duties performed for most flights.

For further details, the specific report's number is 2014654 in the NASA ASRS database. Watch more with this short video I made on the topic or scan this QR code to watch on YouTube.



About the Author

Laura Laster graduated from LeTourneau University in 2004, becoming a flight instructor for the university. She then worked for Dynamic Aviation as a King Air survey pilot and eventually worked at Dynamic Airways during their air carrier certification for Part 121 Supplemental operations... Read More...

SQUALL LINE

Beyond the Numbers: *Mastering Takeoff Performance and Limitation*

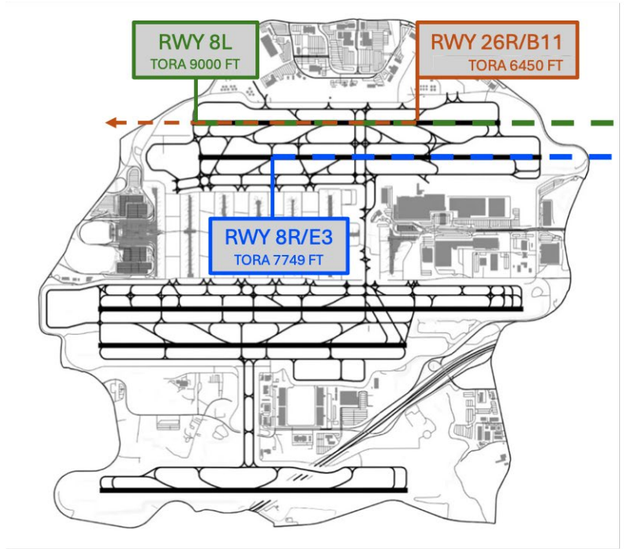
A data-driven look at how windshear, contaminated runways, and runway length reshape your V-speeds

Written by: Ajay Raghavendra, Ph.D.

Every professional pilot is accustomed to the routine: plug the weights into the FMC, verify the V-speeds, and brief the departure. But while our computers are excellent at crunching numbers, they are notoriously tight-lipped about the "*why*" behind the data. When the runway gets shorter, the pavement gets contaminated, or the threat of windshear looms, the underlying physics of takeoff performance can shift in ways that feel counterintuitive.

In this analysis, we take a Boeing 737-800 out of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta (KATL) to see how varying conditions impact our safety margins. The aircraft's weight and balance information are as follows: 2-pilots, 4-flight attendants, 130-adult passengers, ZFW 120.6, GTW 136.3, and Takeoff CG 22.4%. The weather is 15°C, calm winds, and an altimeter setting of 29.92 inches. Takeoff calculations are performed from three runways, i.e., RWY 8L (TORA 9000 ft), RWY 8R/E3 (TORA 7749 ft), and RWY 26R/B11 (TORA 6450 ft), and four scenarios, i.e., normal (thrust optimized), windshear, 1/8 inch standing water (contaminated runway), and a combination of both windshear plus 1/8 inch standing water. These results are summarized in the table below:

By comparing normal (thrust optimized) settings against windshear, 1/8 inch standing water, and the combined scenarios, we can see exactly how the aircraft's performance capability and limitations evolve. It isn't just about whether the aircraft can fly, it's about understanding the trade-offs between fixed derates, assumed temperatures, flap settings, and V-speeds. Our performance calculations are data-driven, but do we truly understand the data? Let's put your technical knowledge to the test and look past the FMC display to the aerodynamic realities of the takeoff roll. Test your knowledge by trying to answer the questions below:



ATL	CREW	6	PAX	130
	ZFW	120.6	FOB	16.2
	GTOW	136.3	CG	22.40%

OAT 15 deg. C ATL: 29.92"	Normal	Windshear	1/8" Standing Water	Windshear + 1/8" Standing Water
RWY 08L TORA 9000 FT				
Fixed Derate	TO-2	TO-2	TO-2	TO-2
Assumed Temp	47	N/A	N/A	N/A
Flaps	5	5	5	5
V1	144	131	117	117
VR	147	136	136	136
V2	150	142	142	142
VRWS	N/A	154	N/A	140
ENG Bleed	AUTO	AUTO	AUTO	AUTO
MRTW	136.4	160.3	143.8	143.8
MRTW LIM	F	F	F	F
RWY 08R/E3 TORA 7749 FT				
Fixed Derate	TO-2	TO-2	TO-1	TO-1
Assumed Temp	38	N/A	N/A	N/A
Flaps	5	15	25	25
V1	134	131	110	110
VR	137	136	128	128
V2	142	142	136	136
VRWS	N/A	147	N/A	131
ENG Bleed	AUTO	AUTO	AUTO	AUTO
MRTW	136.9	149.7	141.2	141.2
MRTW LIM	O	O	O	O
RWY 26R/B11 TORA 6450 FT				
Fixed Derate	TO-1	TO-1	TO	TO
Assumed Temp	29	N/A	N/A	N/A
Flaps	15	5	MRTW Exceeded by 350 Lbs	MRTW Exceeded by 350 Lbs
V1	129	129		
VR	131	135		
V2	139	143		
VRWS	N/A	137		
ENG Bleed	AUTO	AUTO		
MRTW	136.4	139.9		
MRTW LIM	O	F	N/A	N/A

Q1: Why is it optimum to use a derated with an assumed temperature for RWY 8L under normal conditions?

Q2: The MRTW for RWY 8L is 136400 lbs., but the MRTW using windshear performance data is 160300 lbs. What factors account for this 23,900 lb. increase in performance capability?

Q3: Why did the Assumed Temperature and V_1 decrease for RWY 8R/E3 when compared to RWY 8L under normal conditions?

Q4: Why is the Windshear V_R (WSV_R) lower for a contaminated runway vs. a dry runway?

Q5: Assume RWY26R/B11 is the only available runway for departure. What are some options to obtain performance numbers and manage the MRTW exceedance by 350 lbs.?

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Answers for questions Q1–Q5:

While the aerodynamic and regulatory logic behind these calculations is deeply technical, let's look at the practical implications from the flight deck:

Q1: Why is it optimum to use a derated with an assumed temperature for RWY 8L under normal conditions?

Using a Fixed Derate combined with an Assumed Temperature is considered "*optimum*" because it minimizes engine wear and maintenance costs while still meeting all safety requirements.

- *Engine Longevity*: Reducing thrust lowers the internal operating temperatures and pressures of the engines.
- *Performance Matching:* RWY 8L is the longest runway (9,000 ft), providing ample distance to accelerate even with reduced thrust.
- *Weight Alignment*: The Maximum Reduced Takeoff Weight (MRTW) of 136.4 (136,400 lbs.) is almost identical to the aircraft's actual Gross Takeoff Weight (GTOW) of 136.3 (136,300 lbs), meaning the thrust has been perfectly "dialed down" to the minimum necessary for a safe departure.

Q2: The MRTW for RWY 8L is 136,400 lbs., but the MRTW using windshear performance data is 160,300 lbs. What factors account for this 23,900 lb. increase in performance capability?

The massive jump in performance capability (from 136,400 lbs to 160,300 lbs) is primarily due to the removal of thrust reductions.

- *Full Rated Thrust*: While "Normal" operations use TO-2 and an assumed temperature of 47°C for this scenario, the windshear calculation uses TO-2 derated thrust with no assumed temperature.
- *Performance Priorities*: Windshear performance data is designed to maximize the aircraft's ability to "fly out" of a detrimental environmental condition (e.g., microbursts, gusty wind conditions, and windshear conditions). This often involves utilizing the full-thrust capability of the engines and optimized climb profiles that would be unnecessarily aggressive (and expensive) for non-threatening environmental operations.

Q3: Why did the Assumed Temperature and V_1 decrease for RWY 8R/E3 when compared to RWY 8L under normal conditions?

These changes are a direct result of the shorter runway length (7,749 ft. for 8R/E3 vs. 9,000 ft. for 8L).

- *Assumed Temperature (47°C vs 38°C)*: A shorter runway provides less distance to accelerate. To reach takeoff speed safely before the pavement ends, the aircraft needs more actual thrust. Therefore, you cannot "trick" the engine into thinking it is as hot (47°C); you must use a lower assumed temperature (38°C) to produce higher engine output.
- *V_1 (144 kts vs 134 kts)*: V_1 is the "decision speed." On a shorter runway, you must be able to stop the aircraft within the remaining distance if an engine fails. A lower V_1 ensures that if you abort the takeoff at that speed, you still have enough runway left to come to a complete stop.

Q4: Why is the Windshear V_R (WSV_R) lower for a contaminated runway vs. a dry runway?
The Windshear V_R (rotation speed) is reduced on contaminated runways (e.g., 140 kts. vs. 154 kts. on RWY 8L) to get the aircraft airborne sooner.

- *Rolling Resistance*: Standing water increases drag on the tires (friction), making it harder to accelerate to high speeds on the ground.
- *Flap Configuration*: To compensate for the contamination, the aircraft often uses a higher flap setting (e.g., Flaps 25 for contaminated vs. Flaps 5 for dry). Higher flaps create more lift at lower speeds, allowing the aircraft to lift off the ground earlier to avoid the performance-sapping effects of the water. However, the added parasitic drag with a higher Flap setting significantly degrades the aircraft's climb gradient, particularly in an engine-out scenario (One Engine Inoperative - IOE).

Q5: Assume RWY26R/B11 is the only available runway for departure. What are some options to obtain performance numbers and manage the MRTW exceedance by 350 lbs.?

If RWY 26R/B11 is the only option and the MRTW is exceeded by 350 lbs. due to standing water, the crew must find a way to either increase performance or decrease weight.

- *Offload Weight*: The most direct solution is to remove 350 lbs. of payload (approximately 2 passengers or a small amount of cargo/fuel).
- *Wait for Better Conditions*: If the standing water clears or the runway becomes "wet", the MRTW would likely increase enough to cover the gap. A headwind or decrease in air

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temperature from a frontal passage will also aid in improving takeoff performance.

- *Bleeds OFF Takeoff*: The table shows Engine Bleeds in “AUTO”. Switching engine bleeds to “OFF” for takeoff provides more thrust to the engines, which can significantly increase the MRTW.
- *Select a Different Flap Setting*: Depending on the specific aircraft manuals, a different flap setting (if available) might offer a better climb gradient or shorter field-length performance.

Ultimately, takeoff performance is more than a set of speeds to be cross-checked during the Before Start Checklist. Takeoff performance data is a complex balancing act of physics, regulation, and environmental reality. While our modern flight management systems are incredibly capable, they are only as good as the pilot’s ability to interpret the output. Understanding why a shorter runway demands a lower V_1 or how 1/8” of water can trigger a 350-lbs. weight penalty is what separates a “button-pusher” from a master of the aircraft. As we continue to operate in challenging environments, staying curious about the “why” ensures that when the numbers don’t add up or the conditions deteriorate, we have the technical foundation to make the safest command decision.



About the Author

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BAGGAGE



Reducing Risk with Implementing Psychological Safety in the Flight Deck

Written By: Reini Thijssen

Do you remember a time you did not feel safe to speak up in the flight deck, or in a meeting? Chances are that something comes to mind immediately. Psychological safety is not an abstract idea. It shows up in how we talk to one another, how we handle mistakes, and how confident we feel to raise concerns. Whether in a flight deck, the office, or even at home, the way we respond to one another can either support connection and teamwork or erode them. What exactly is psychological safety? Why is it so important, and how does increasing it impact safety in aviation, or teams' general performance? This article explains what psychological safety looks like in practice, why it matters, and how you can make a difference in your environment.

Harvard Professor Amy Edmondson coined the term *psychological safety*, defining it as "the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking." This concept has, over time, become foundational to understanding how teams and crews learn, communicate, and perform effectively.

Psychological safety is not about "being nice" or avoiding conflict. It is about creating an environment where open and honest communication is encouraged, where different perspectives are valued, and where learning, growth, and safety are central. Creating a psychologically safe environment encourages team members to be vulnerable, communicate openly, and fully participate in the team's work. It is a climate where trust, respect, and acceptance are the norm. Psychological safety is the foundation of every safe flight, because safety reports, mistakes, and maintenance concerns are only raised when people trust that their voice matters. When that trust erodes, people stop reporting fatigue. Maintenance crews skip discussions to avoid tension. Controllers "push through" exhaustion. And flight decks become quieter, not safer.

Science Behind Psychological Safety

We like to believe that, even in a critical situation, we speak up and "do the right thing," even if there is tension or a direct confrontation. However, research and real-world experience show that silence in high-stakes environments like aviation is not about negligence or lack of care. It is about fear: fear of blame, embarrassment, being dismissed, or overstepping the hierarchy.

The brain processes physical and psychological threats in almost the same way. If it is facing real danger or simply feeling criticized, excluded, or talked over, the same system activates. The brain does not distinguish between. "I might get hurt," and "I might look stupid." Both trigger a stress response: narrowed attention, increased heart rate, reduced working memory, and a rush of cortisol. In other words, the brain shifts from problem-solving to self-protection.

This is why small moments of sarcasm, dismissal, or tension can undermine performance. When psychological safety breaks down, the frontal lobe, the part we rely on for focus, judgment, and reasoning, steps back, and the fight-or-flight system takes over. Cognitive load rises, situational awareness fades, and teamwork begins to weaken.

Take an example in the flight deck. A first officer has just had an interaction that made them feel psychologically unsafe. Now they are no longer fully focused on the next steps of the checklist. Instead of processing information clearly, they may be replaying the interaction in their mind, second-guessing their judgment, or hesitating to speak up again. Their attention shifts from the task to self-protection. This impact may be easy to overlook, but even slight changes can have a huge impact on safety.

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

Harvard researcher Timothy Clark describes four developmental stages of psychological safety, all essential in crews:

1. **Inclusion Safety** - "I belong here."Everyone feels respected and accepted, regardless of background, role, or rank. When crews greet new members warmly or include everyone in briefings, it reinforces a sense of belonging and teamwork.
2. **Learner Safety** - "I can ask questions and make mistakes."Trainees, students, or new hires feel safe to admit when they do not understand something. Instructors respond with curiosity, not criticism.
3. **Contributor Safety** - "My input adds value."
   People are encouraged to share ideas or raise concerns. A flight attendant suggesting a smoother boarding process, or a dispatcher noting a fuel discrepancy, feels empowered to speak up.
4. **Challenger Safety** - "I can question decisions."
   Crew members can challenge the status quo respectfully; a pilot questioning a challenging procedure, the controller voicing fatigue, or a flight attendant flagging an unsafe situation.

These stages mirror how trust grows: belonging first, learning next, contributing third, and finally, demonstrating the courage to challenge. Without one of the stages, the system weakens.

Building Safety Through Communication

When someone admits an error, do we thank them or criticize them? When someone challenges a plan, do we listen or shut them down? In a study of aviation teams, the most effective captains were not those who demanded authority, but those who modeled vulnerability. They admitted when they did not know something. Two practical frameworks can help flight crews and aviation professionals improve psychological safety in their environments:

1. Non-Violent Communication (NVC)

Developed by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, Non-Violent Communication helps teams speak with clarity and empathy, even during high-stress moments. It follows four steps:

1. **Observation** - Describe what you've noticed without blame or judgment.
   "I've noticed our pre-flight briefings have been starting late today."
2. **Feeling** – Share how the situation affects you.
   "I feel a bit anxious because it puts pressure on our timeline."
3. **Need** – Identify the operational or personal need behind your concern.
   "I need predictability so I can manage my duties safely and stay ahead of the workflow."
4. **Request** – Make a clear, respectful request to move things forward.
   "Can we agree on a briefing start time that works for everyone on the crew?" This approach helps reduce defensiveness and supports a safer, more collaborative operating environment.



2. Reflective and Active Listening

Reflective listening is the practice of listening not to respond, but to truly understand what another person is communicating. It helps build connection and trust, even in moments of disagreement. Another cornerstone of psychological safety is active listening. It means hearing the words while also understanding the emotion and intent behind them.

Reflective and active listening involves the following:

- **Be fully present** by minimizing distractions and avoiding multitasking.
- **Attend with empathy** by creating a nonjudgmental space where others feel safe to speak.
- **Practice patience** by allowing silence and pauses instead of rushing to respond.
- **Reflect with clarity** by paraphrasing what you heard to confirm understanding (e.g., "So you are saying fatigue has been harder to report lately?").
- **Show empathy** with validating responses such as, "That sounds really challenging."
- **Maintain self-awareness** by noticing your own reactions and biases so they do not interfere with genuine listening.

3. Micro-Actions That Build Trust

Just as microaggressions erode inclusion, **microaffirmations** rebuild it, one small act at a time:

- Acknowledge contributions publicly.
- Make eye contact equally with all crew members.
- Thank someone for raising a concern, even if it is uncomfortable.
- Invite quieter voices into the conversation: "We have not heard your view yet."
- Celebrate milestones, even small wins.

These moments might seem minor, but they are powerful signals—you are telling your coworkers in those moments that they matter, that their voice counts.

4. Microaffirmations: The Small Gestures That Build Safety

While psychological safety is often discussed at the organizational level, it also grows through micro-behaviors.

Microaffirmations are the opposite of microaggressions, which can subtly undermine trust by making dismissive comments, telling inappropriate jokes, or ignoring contributions. Over time, microaffirmations build inclusion, while microaggressions erode it. In high-performance environments like aviation, inclusion is not just a social add-on; it is a safety mechanism.

Microaffirmations are small acts that make people feel valued and respected. These are some examples of how to implement microaffirmations:

- Acknowledge input from anyone during briefings.
- Smile and use open body language.
- Invite quieter voices into the discussion.
- Thank someone for speaking up
- Give credit for ideas or observations, regardless of rank or role.
- Respond to questions with patience rather than dismissal.
- Show curiosity instead of judgment when someone makes a mistake.
- Offer encouragement or recognition for effort, not just outcomes.

Reflection Exercise

Use these questions to reflect on how you contribute to psychological safety in your environment:

- How do I typically respond when someone speaks up, especially if it feels uncomfortable or critical?
- Do I make it easier for others to admit mistakes or uncertainty around me?
- When was the last time I acknowledged or thanked someone for raising a concern or offering feedback?
- How can I show curiosity rather than defensiveness in my next difficult conversation?
- What is one small action I can take each day to make my space, whether the flight deck or the office, feel safer for others?

Take a moment to notice patterns or opportunities for growth; they often begin with small, consistent shifts.

Final Thoughts

Psychological safety is essential for safe and effective aviation operations. By modeling openness, practicing empathy, offering affirmations, and supporting each other, we can foster a culture in which speaking up is both natural and clearly understood to be as critical to safety as any other operational precaution.

Do you notice moments when speaking up feels difficult, or where you hold back concerns due to fear of judgment or consequences? Building psychological safety is a skill, and support can make a meaningful difference. Emerald Mental Health helps pilots and other aviation professionals strengthen psychological safety, communication, and emotional well-being through counseling and mental health coaching. If you need support with this or any related mental health concern, contact Emerald Mental Health for a free consultation via reini@emeraldmentalhealth.com or visit ***www.emeraldmentalhealth.com****.*

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About the Author

Reini Thijssen is a licensed mental health counselor (LMHC, LPC) and a certified life coach specializing in supporting pilots and individuals in high-demand professions both within and outside of aviation. She has been a writer for Aero Crew News since 2019 and covers various aviation-related topics... Read More...



FITNESS

Workout Survival Guide: *How to Eat on the Road Without Losing Your Mind or Your Progress*



Written By: Scott Darragh

Last month we fixed your workout. You now have a dumbbell-only training session that works in any hotel gym with any combination of broken equipment and questionable flooring. If you tried it, good. If you didn't—go back and review last month's Fitness. We'll be here when you return.

This month we tackle the thing that actually determines whether any of that training matters—food. Specifically, how to eat on the road in a way that doesn't require a cooler bag, a meal prep Sunday, or the willpower of a monk. Let's start with the honest version of what's actually happening out there.

You land after a four-leg day. You're dehydrated. Your cortisol is elevated. Your sleep was broken. And somewhere between the gate and the hotel shuttle, your body has quietly shifted into a biochemical state that makes every bad food decision feel completely reasonable. The pizza at 10pm isn't weakness. It's biology.

Here's what most fitness advice gets wrong about travel nutrition—it assumes you have control over your environment. It hands you a meal plan built for someone with a kitchen, a grocery store, and a predictable schedule. Then it calls you undisciplined when the plan falls apart at 30,000 feet. That's not a nutrition problem. That's a strategy problem. So, let's build a better one.

The Only Goal That Actually Matters on the Road

Forget optimization. When you're traveling, the goal is not to eat perfectly. The goal is to not undo your progress. That's it. This single mindset shift changes everything. You stop white knuckling every meal. You stop the all-or-nothing thinking that turns one bad airport lunch into a three-day spiral. You start making decisions that are good enough—and good enough, done consistently, beats perfectly done occasionally every single time.

The One Nutrient You're Almost Certainly Under-Eating: Protein

This is not because you don't know protein matters. You do. But because on the road, without your usual routine, protein is the first thing that disappears from your plate and the last thing you think to replace.

Here's why it matters more than you think right now. Protein keeps you full longer than carbohydrates or fat. It preserves muscle tissue when your training is inconsistent. It has the highest thermic effect of any macronutrient, meaning your body burns more calories just digesting it. And it stabilizes blood sugar, which directly reduces the kind of late-night cravings that end in whatever the hotel lobby is selling at midnight.

Your target is simple. Aim for roughly one gram of protein per pound of your target body weight, every day, regardless of where you are.

On the road, in practice, that looks like this: Greek yogurt or eggs at the hotel breakfast. Grilled chicken, fish, or a burger without the bun at the crew meal or layover restaurant. A protein bar in your bag as insurance, not a replacement. String cheese, beef jerky, or deli meat from whatever convenience store is near the hotel. You are not building a perfect plate. You are hitting your number.

What to Do at Restaurants (Which Is Every Meal)

You don't cook on the road. You order. So, let's talk about ordering like someone who has a goal.

First, anchor every meal with a protein source. Whatever else ends up on the plate is secondary. Steak, salmon, chicken, shrimp, eggs—pick one and build around it.

Second, be honest about alcohol. One drink with a client dinner is a social reality. Four drinks because the overnight is boring is a choice that costs you more than the calories. Alcohol suppresses fat oxidation for hours after consumption and destroys sleep quality in ways that compound over a trip. This isn't a lecture. It's a dashboard reading. Know what the gauge says.

Third, don't fear the menu. Most restaurants will build you something reasonable if you ask directly. Protein plus a vegetable plus whatever else fits your goal. Sauces on the side. Skip the bread if you're not hungry—include it if you are and adjust elsewhere.

Rigid rules break under travel pressure. Flexible principles hold.

The Hydration Problem Nobody Talks About

You are chronically dehydrated and you don't know it. Cabin air at cruising altitude has humidity levels between five and twenty percent. A typically comfortable room sits around forty to sixty percent. That gap is silent and cumulative. By the time you feel thirsty at altitude, you're already meaningfully dehydrated.

Dehydration increases cortisol. Elevated cortisol drives fat storage, particularly visceral fat which is the dangerous kind that accumulates around your organs. It also mimics hunger, which means a significant portion of what you're interpreting as food cravings on long flights is actually your body asking for water.

The fix is not complicated. Sixteen to twenty ounces of water before boarding. Continue drinking throughout the flight. Electrolytes (a simple packet in your bag) make a measurable difference in how you feel and how your body functions on arrival.

This one habit, done consistently, is worth more than most supplements you're probably considering.

The Real Takeaway

Hotel gyms aren't the problem. Lack of strategy is. That was last month's conclusion, and it applies here too. Just swap gym for meals.

- You are not failing at nutrition on the road because you lack discipline. You're failing because you've been handed a system built for someone else's life and told to make it work in yours.
- Hit your protein. Anchor every meal with a real food source. Make the best available choice — not the perfect one.
- Stay hydrated.

Do these consistently across a month of trips and you will look and feel categorically different than the version of you that started reading this column.

Next month, we go practical in a different way. No gym. No equipment. No excuses. We're going to walk through a full four-day trip, day by day, and show you exactly which habits to prioritize when the hotel gym isn't happening. Sleep, movement, recovery—the unglamorous stuff that quietly determines everything else. That's next month.



About the Author

Scott Darragh is an MSP-based 737 airline captain, former U.S. Army helicopter pilot, aviation officer, who holds a BS in history and journalism from Washington State University. Read More...

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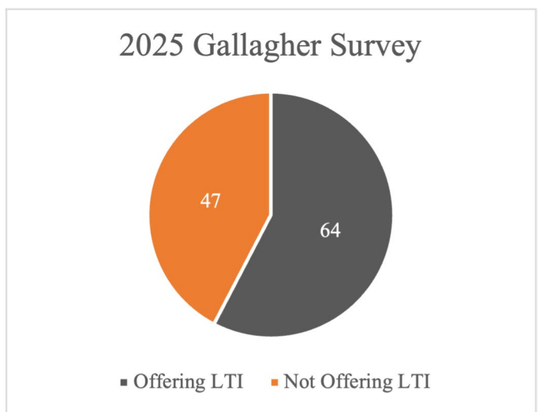
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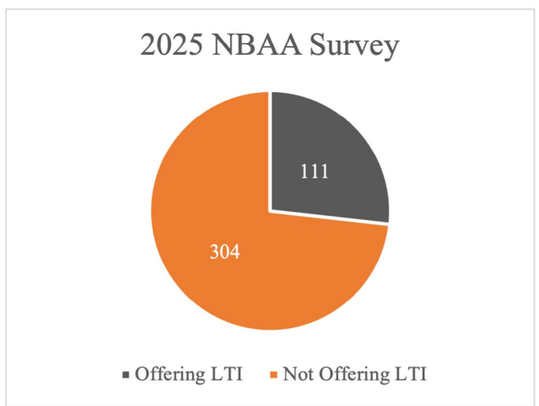
A Deep-Dive on Long-Term Incentive Payments and Total Direct Compensation

Written By: Christopher M. Broyhill, PhD, CAM, CCP



I've discussed base salary and total cash compensation extensively in the articles I've written here, so this month I thought I'd turn to a form of compensation that is becoming increasingly popular in business aviation circles—long-term incentive payments (LTI). Unlike yearly short-term incentive payments or bonuses, LTI payments are typically awarded on a yearly basis, but they required a vesting period that is typically three to five years before the employee receives the associated funds.





Companies Offering LTI – 2025 Survey Data
(National Business Aviation Association, 2025) (A.J Gallagher and Associates, 2025)

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The NBAA and Gallagher surveys provide two different views of the same population. As I've mentioned before, the NBAA survey tends to capture smaller organizations, 10.7 personnel/organization in 2025, and the Gallagher survey captures larger organizations, 41.7 personnel/organization in 2025). Since Gallagher captures larger organizations and corporate flight departments, it's not a surprise that the percentage of organizations offering LTI is higher in that sample.

LTI payments come into two categories, equity or cash. For publicly held companies, equity is most common, with Restricted Stock Awards being the most popular form. For privately held ones, cash is the usual mechanism. The chart and notes below depict how LTI mechanisms are distributed into the two survey samples, along with a brief description of each type of LTI payment.

Survey	Restricted Stock Awards[1]	Other[2]	Performance Shares[3]	Long Term Cash[4]	Incentive Stock Options[5]	Non-Qualified Stock Options[6]
NBAA	47%	14%	5%	23%	6%	5%
Gallagher	64%	0%	11%	7%	3%	7%
Weighted Average	57.6%	5.1%	8.7%	12.6%	4.2%	6.1%

1. **Restricted Stock Award (RSA)** - Grants of stock or stock units subject to restrictions until the employee has worked for the company for a specified period. The employee may receive or accrue dividends during the vesting period.
2. **Other** - Includes Performance Units, Phantom Stock and Stock Appreciation Rights.
3. **Performance Shares Plan** - A conditional stock or stock unit award plan in which the payout is determined by the company's achievement of specified performance goals over several years. The value of the share is equal to market value of common stock at end of performance period Stock Option (NQSO).
4. **Long-Term Cash Award** - Cash paid out based on growth or decline of grant amount over a specified multi-year period.
5. **Incentive Stock Option (ISO)** - An option that qualifies for favorable tax treatment (no tax at exercise and treatment is at capital gains tax rate), granted to an employee to purchase company stock at a specified price for a specified period.
6. **Non-Qualified Stock Options (NQSO)** - An option that does not qualify for favorable tax treatment (tax at exercise), granted to an employee to purchase company stock at a specified price for a specified period. Also called non-statutory stock option.

LTI Mechanisms

(National Business Aviation Association, 2025) (A.J Gallagher and Associates, 2025)

So, which employees in an organization receive LTI? That depends on the compensation philosophy and pay structures of the company. In some companies, LTI payments are only made to those in leadership positions. In others, they're made down to the line-employee level. The chart below shows percentages of personnel in different business aviation jobs who received some form of LTI in 2025.

Position	NBAA Percentage	Gallagher Percentage	Weighted Average
Avionics Technician	3%	0%	2.1%
Captain	19%	30%	23.1%
Chief Pilot	26%	54%	34.1%
Director of Maintenance	22%	39%	26.7%
Director/Aviation Manager (Flying)	35%	66%	38.3%
Director/Aviation Manager (Non-Flying)	35%	72%	61.4%
First Officer	12%	30%	20.1%
Flight Attendant	9%	15%	11.9%
Flight Coordinator/Office Manager	6%	19%	9.4%
Flight Technician	6%	12%	11.8%
Line Service Technician	3%	11%	4.2%
Maintenance Assistant	16%	11%	13.9%
Maintenance Supervisor	11%	18%	14.4%
Maintenance Technician	7%	6%	6.8%
Scheduler	5%	9%	6.3%
Senior Captain	22%	39%	30.3%
Senior Flight Attendant	19%	23%	21.3%
Senior Scheduler	5.5%	6%	5.6%

LTI Payments to Aviation Department Employees

(National Business Aviation Association, 2025) (A.J Gallagher and Associates, 2025)

I know there are many people in our industry who are very cash focused. I'm not one of them. I'm a big believer in LTI because it provides "stickiness" to the retention equation, or what is more euphemistically referred to as "golden handcuffs." As LTI payments are made over the years and begin to vest, then if an employee departs, he or she will be leaving money on the table. Let's say that an employee gets an annual LTI award in the form of RSAs that equal $30,000. And let's say that $30,000 vests 1/3rd annually, so the employee gets $10,000 in year one, $10,000 in year two, and $10,000 in year three. What actually happens though, is that as the LTI payments are made, they start stacking. In year two, the employee receives $10,000 from the LTI award made the prior year and $10,000 from the current year award. By year three, the employee is actually receiving $30,000, the final $10,000 from the two years previous award, $10,000 from the previous year, and $10,000 from the current year. From that point forward, they're receiving $30,000 every year, but if them resign, they'll leave at least $20,000 on the table.

Another reason I'm a fan of LTI payments is because they keep us, as employees of a business, engaged in that business and engaged in the success of the company. One of the biggest predictors of an aviation department's longevity and continued existence is the degree to which it is aligned with the larger company's objectives. LTI can be a tool to incentivize that alignment.

As always, feel free to reach out with any questions you might have on LTI or any business aviation compensation matter. You can reach me at drchrisbroyhill@aircompcalculator.com.

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Investment Properties for Airline Pilots: *How to Use Your Layover Cities to Build Wealth*

Written by: Spencer Wartman

Bottom Line Up Front: Airline pilots are actually well-positioned to build a real estate portfolio—and your base cities are a logical, strategic place to start.

You know your base cities better than most investors ever will. You know which neighborhoods are close to the airport, which areas are growing, and where other crew members are paying premium rent for a crash pad. That insider knowledge is not just useful in the cockpit; it is also a genuine financial advantage that very few people outside of aviation possess. This article will walk you through how to take advantage of this underrated asset builder.

Why Your Base Cities Are a Hidden Investment Opportunity

Think about what you already know about your layover and base cities. You know which areas have strong rental demand because crew members compete for crash pads there. You know which neighborhoods are convenient for commuters. You have probably watched certain markets appreciate over years of flying through them.

Proximity to a major hub airport is a powerful rental demand driver. Travel nurses, regional airline pilots, corporate crew members, and other aviation professionals all need housing near airports—and they often prefer furnished or short-term rental options. That is a tenant pool most landlords in non-aviation markets never even think about.

Owning a property in your base city can also solve a personal problem: instead of paying for a crash pad, you own one. Your property can house you during trips while also generating rental income when you are not there—a dual-purpose asset that many pilots overlook entirely.

How Lenders Look at Airline Pilot Income for Investment Properties

Here is where many pilots get tripped up: they approach a generic lender, receive confused looks about per diem, guarantee pay, and variable hours, and walk away thinking they cannot qualify. The truth is that the problem is not your income—it is the lender's lack of familiarity with how airline pay works.

What a pilot-specialized lender knows how to do:

- **Calculate your qualifying income correctly.** This means understanding how to use your W-2s, your pilot contract's guaranteed minimums, and the difference between taxable income and total compensation including per diem.
- **Account for variable pay.** Overtime, trip trades, and premium pay can all factor into qualifying income when properly documented. A lender who does not understand pilot pay will often exclude these entirely, artificially lowering your qualifying amount.
- **Work with your debt-to-income** (DTI) **ratio strategically.** Investment property loans typically require a stronger DTI. A specialized lender will help you structure your application to maximize your qualifying income before you apply.
- **Use projected rental income to offset the new liability.** On investment properties, lenders can often use a percentage of the market rent from the new property to help offset the mortgage payment in your DTI calculation. This is a critical tool that can make the difference between qualifying and not.

Investment Property Loan Basics: What Pilots Need to Know

Investment property loans are different from primary residence loans in a few key ways:

- **Down-payment requirements are higher.** Most conventional investment property loans require 15-25% down depending on the property type and loan program. This is a significant but manageable hurdle for pilots who have been saving.
- **Rates are typically higher than primary residence rates.** Expect an adjustment of roughly 0.5-0.75% above what you would see on a primary home loan. This is standard across the industry and should be factored into your cash-flow projections.
- **Reserve requirements apply.** Lenders typically want to see two to six months of reserves (mortgage payments) in liquid assets after closing. Pilots with strong savings are often well-positioned here.
- **Credit score standards are stricter.** A score of 720 or higher will give you access to the best pricing. Work on your credit profile well before you apply.
- **VA loans cannot be used for pure investment properties,** but there is an important exception that veteran pilots should absolutely know about: you can purchase a multi-unit property (up to four units) with a VA loan, live in one unit, and rent out the others. This is commonly called house hacking—and it is completely VA-compliant.

Short-Term Rentals: The Crash-Pad Economy

Pilots understand the crash-pad model intuitively because they have lived it. What many do not realize is that the same model that makes crash pads valuable for renters makes them highly profitable for owners.

Properties near major hub airports—Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Miami—command premium short-term rental rates because the tenant pool is not just vacationers. It includes airline crew members, travel nurses, corporate consultants, and aviation professionals who need flexible, furnished housing close to the airport.

If you own near your base, you have a built-in understanding of what that tenant pool wants: reliable WiFi, a quiet place to sleep on a turnaround, easy parking, and proximity to the crew bus. You are not guessing at amenities—you already know exactly what makes a crash pad desirable.

Before pursuing a short-term rental strategy, make sure to research local ordinances in your target city. Short-term rental regulations vary significantly by municipality, and some areas have restrictions that make long-term rentals more straightforward. Your lender and a local real estate agent familiar with aviation areas can help you navigate this.

The Domicile Change Strategy: Turn Every Move into an Asset

One of the most underutilized wealth-building strategies for airline pilots is the domicile change. Every time your base changes—whether by choice or necessity—you have an opportunity.

Here is how it works in practice: you purchase a home at your current domicile as a primary residence (with better rates and lower down payment than an investment property). When you change domiciles, instead of selling, you convert that home to a rental. You then purchase again at your new domicile as a primary residence.

Over a career, this strategy can result in owning multiple properties in multiple aviation markets—all acquired at primary residence rates, all generating rental income. The key requirements:

- You must genuinely intend to occupy each property as your primary residence when you purchase it.
- You need sufficient equity or cash reserves to qualify for the new purchase while carrying the existing property.
- A lender who understands pilot income is essential for they will know how to structure your application to account for both the existing rental and your new purchase.
- Work with a CPA who understands real estate investing alongside your mortgage professional. The tax implications of rental income, depreciation, and property expenses can significantly impact your overall financial picture.

Getting Started: What to Do Before You Apply

Before you start making offers on investment properties, here is how to set yourself up for success:

1. **Talk to a pilot-specialized lender first.** Get a clear picture of your qualifying income based on your actual pay structure, not what a generic underwriter assumes. This conversation costs nothing and gives you a realistic ceiling for what you can purchase.
2. **Pull your credit and address any issues.** Investment property loans reward strong credit scores. A few months of attention to your credit profile before applying can meaningfully improve your rate.
3. **Gather two years of tax returns and W-2s.** Lenders will want to see income history. If you recently upgraded or changed airlines, be prepared to discuss how your income has changed.
4. **Research your target market.** Look at rental vacancy rates, average rents, and proximity to airport crew transportation. Your knowledge of the aviation ecosystem is an advantage. Use it.
5. **Identify a real estate agent who works with investors.** Ideally, find one who understands the aviation market in your target city. The right agent will know which

properties make financial sense as rentals, not just which ones look nice.

6. **Run the numbers conservatively.** Budget for vacancy, maintenance, and property management if you plan to be hands-off. A cash-flowing property should work even with realistic expense assumptions—not just best-case projections.

The Runway is Clear, Time to Take Off

Airline pilots have income, schedule flexibility between trips, insider market knowledge, and in many cases VA loan benefits—a combination that makes real estate investing genuinely accessible. What has historically held pilots back is not financial readiness, it is working with the wrong lender and not having a clear picture of how the strategy fits together.

Your layover cities are not just places you pass through. For the right pilot, they are the beginning of a real estate portfolio built on firsthand knowledge that most investors will never have.

If you want to talk through what an investment property strategy could look like for your specific situation—income, base city, VA eligibility, or first-time investing—reach out directly. This is exactly the kind of planning conversation I enjoy having.



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Should You Open a Trump Account? *A Look at Your Options and Why Saving Early Wins*

Written by: Nolan Clark, CFP

Saving for Your Child's Future Doesn't Have to Be Complicated

Did you ever find yourself studying for an exam the night before? Some people call this procrastination; others claim this is when they do their best work.

My most difficult class in college was Portfolio Theory. The professor knew this was a challenging class and warned that the outcome would not be pretty for those who procrastinated. I'm sure more than a few students thought, "We'll see about that." His suggestion was simple: study 15 minutes a day for the entire semester, and by finals week, you'd barely need to review. I must admit, it sounded nice. Fifteen minutes felt like nothing. Could such a small daily habit compound into something meaningful?

As it turned out, the answer was yes. The same principle applies to saving for your children, your retirement, or any future goal.

Some folks claim they perform best with limited time, but when it comes to saving money, procrastinating rarely leads to great outcomes. My professor's lesson on study habits was the best investment lesson of all: small, consistent action compounds.

Whether it's 15 minutes of studying or $15 a month invested over 18 years at a 10% return, it adds up, believe it or not, (to about $7,000).

If you don't make it past this sentence, please take this with you:
Saving $15 a month or whatever amount feels insignificant today will most likely turn into something significant in the future.

Doing something is infinitely better than doing nothing. Saving in an imperfect account beats spending years searching for the perfect one and never opening anything. As someone wisely put it, **America doesn't have a savings crisis because people choose the wrong accounts, it's because many don't save at all.**

That perspective brings me peace. It lets me move forward, perhaps imperfectly, but consistently.

The Trump Account Basics

The specific account mechanics and details in this section draw directly from savingforcollege.com and related guidance for Trump Accounts. Please see sources linked at the end of the article for more information.

Let's take a look at The Trump Account, one of the newest savings tools available. It's a tax advantaged investment account for U.S. citizens under age 18, designed to support a broad range of future goals: higher education, a first home, or long-term savings.

The $1,000 question: If your child is born between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2028, they're eligible for a $1,000 pilot contribution from the US Treasury. To me, that's a no brainer. Even if you never add another penny, $1,000 today is better than not having $1,000.

What if you don't qualify for the $1,000 deposit?

Keep in mind that just because you *can* use a certain account doesn't mean it's the best fit for your goals. Continue reading to learn more about the Trump Account and check out my section below on which types of accounts best align with common savings goals for children.

How to Open a Trump Account (Form 4547)

- Open and claim the $1,000 deposit (if eligible) by filing IRS Form 4547, ideally with your 2025 tax return (due April 15, 2026).
- Timeline: The IRS plans to send activation info starting May 2026, with accounts going live in early July 2026.
- You'll be contacted by a custodian (Fidelity, Schwab, etc.) with whom your Trump Account will be established, with further instructions on how to complete account setup. If you use a certain custodian already, you will be eligible to transfer your Trump Account to the custodian of your choice with no tax consequences.

Ownership & Contributions

- Ownership: The account is in the child's name; you serve as custodian/authorized individual until the child reaches age 18.
- Contribution channels & limits:
    - No contributions are necessary, but you can deposit up to $5,000 per year to maximize growth. The initial $1,000 deposit does NOT count towards the yearly $5,000 contribution limit.

Investment Approach (Before Age 18)

- During the "growth period" (before age 18), funds are invested in low-cost U.S. stock index funds; as custodian, you can select among eligible options. More to come once the program goes live.

What Happens When My Child Turns 18?

At the end of the growth period, the Trump Account becomes your child's asset and follows traditional IRA rules. They can then:

- Keep the Trump Account - Let it continue tax-deferred growth, and the account automatically becomes a traditional IRA.
- Convert to a Roth IRA - Pay income tax on the balance at their (likely low) tax rate, then enjoy tax free growth going forward; this is expected to be a popular strategy.
- Roll over to an Employer Plan - Move funds to a 401(k), 403(b), or governmental 457(b), if the Trump Account has no after-tax basis.
- Take Distributions - Withdraw for education, a first home, or any purpose; distributions are taxable as ordinary income and may face a 10% early withdrawal penalty before 59½ unless an exception applies (traditional IRA rules).
    - Education expenses and $10,000 lifetime allowance towards the purchase of a first-time home are usually exempt from penalty.

More can be found on Trump Accounts directly from the official government website: Trump Accounts - Jumpstarting the American Dream The Trump Account website mentions that another advantage in the account is "The power of time in the market." I love this focus and of course it is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Trump Account. There are many savings vehicles to use for your children where the money can grow over time with compound interest.

The question becomes: What is the long-term goal of the account? In other words, what will this money be used for?

Instead of breaking down the pros/cons of every type of college account, I wanted to share two of the most common questions/scenarios we hear from clients and the tools that often make the most sense. Think of each account as a tool in a toolbox. All are useful in the right situation, but the challenge is matching the tool to the goal.

Scenario 1: "I'm confident my child will pursue education after high school, but I still want flexibility."

A 529 plan is usually the most effective option here. The parents or grandparents can contribute directly to the 529 plan and depending on their state, receive a state income tax deduction, the earnings grow tax-free, and can be withdrawn tax free for qualified education expenses. These 529s also have no contribution limits set by the IRS.

One of the biggest concerns I hear from parents is, "What if I overfund a 529?" The good news is that 529 plans have grown significantly more flexible over the years, and many of the old worries no longer apply in some circumstances.

If your child earns scholarships, chooses not to attend college, or has leftover funds for any reason, current rules now allow up to $35,000 (lifetime) to be rolled over from a 529 into the beneficiary's Roth IRA. It is key that the 529 is opened in the child's name for 15 years to be eligible for this rollover. It is typically a prudent decision to at least open a 529 as soon as possible, even if you don't put in a dollar for a while, to get that 15-year clock ticking to be eligible. If eligible, this gives unused education dollars a powerful second life as longterm, taxfree retirement savings.

There's also the option to transfer unused 529 funds to another child, giving families even more flexibility when plans change.

For families worried about "overfunding," here's some perspective:

If you've built up $35,000 in a 529 to the point where the rollover becomes relevant, that's already an incredible accomplishment.

As I often say: save $35,000 first and then worry about flexibility. Most families never regret having too much saved for education, but many regret not starting early enough.

Scenario 2: "I want zero restrictions and am not interested in a 529. I want an 'Adult Fund' they can use for anything."

A custodial taxable brokerage account (UTMA or UGMA) prioritizes flexibility over tax perks that comes with a 529. The funds can be used for any purpose, and you will have a broader array of investment options. With either a UTMA or UGMA, the account is the child's asset with the guardian usually as custodian over the account. Once the child reaches age of majority for their state, the young adult then becomes full owner and can do with it as they please.

As Mark Kantrowitz notes in his article comparing custodial taxable brokerage accounts vs. 529s, a few trade-offs include:

- Taxes each year under "kiddie tax" rules; no tax-free qualified distribution like a 529.
- Financial aid: Counted as student assets,

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often reducing aid eligibility by 20% of the asset value. This is higher than a parent-owned 529.

If maximum flexibility matters more than potentially optimizing taxes and financial aid, then a UTMA/UGMA could be the right tool for you.

Bottom Line:

If your child is born between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2028, it's worth seriously considering a Trump Account to receive the $1,000 initial deposit. You can then decide whether to pair it with another savings vehicle, like a 529 plan or a custodial account, depending on your long-term goals. No matter which account you choose, remember to save a little now, even if it feels insignificant. Consistency beats the perfect plan in theory that may or may not happen.

I leave you with two quotes from personal finance expert, Morgan Housel. He explains in his book, *The Psychology of Money,* that sometimes sticking to a simple strategy is more effective than endlessly searching for the perfect one. Don't get bogged down by details; focus on saving and spending less than you earn.

"My own theory is that, in the real world, people do not want the mathematically optimal strategy. They want the strategy that maximizes how well they sleep at night."

"The reasonable investors who love their technically imperfect strategies have an edge, because they're more likely to stick with those strategies."

Resources:

- Trump Accounts Explained: $1,000 for Babies Born 2025–2028
- Trump Accounts - Jumpstarting the American Dream
- 529 vs. UTMA/UGMA: Which is Best for College Savings?



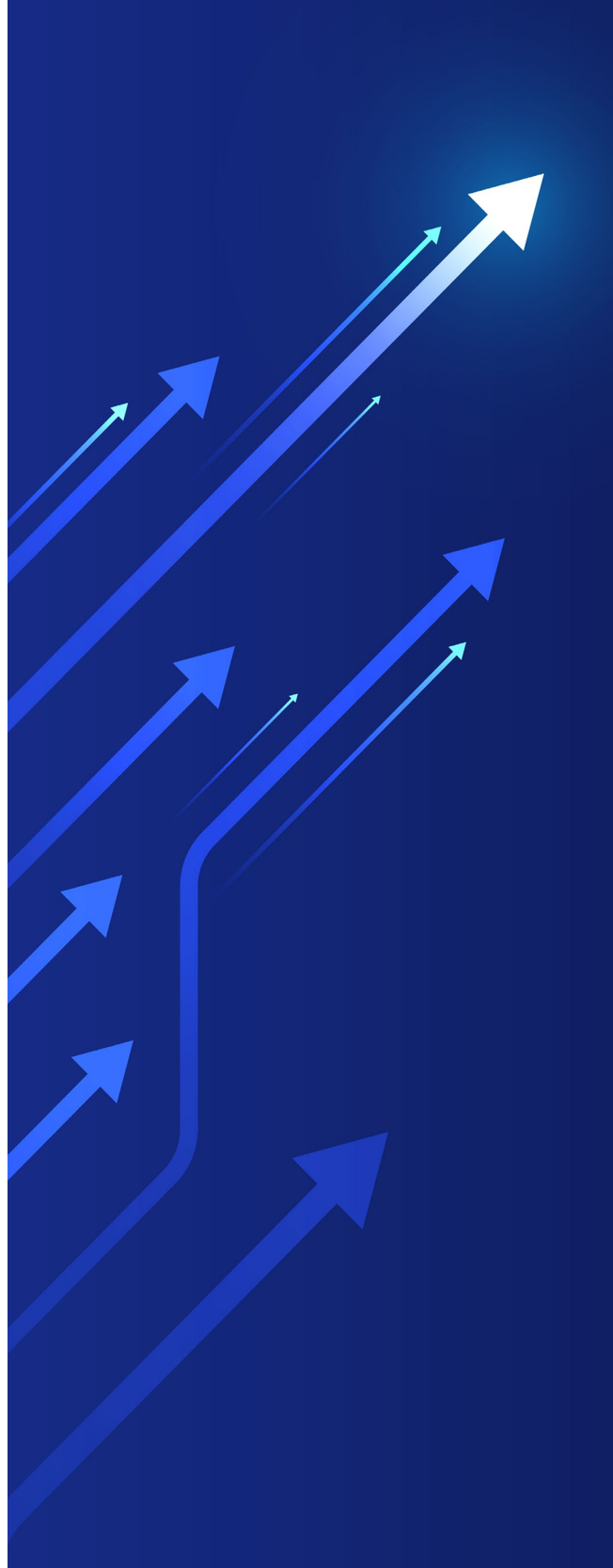
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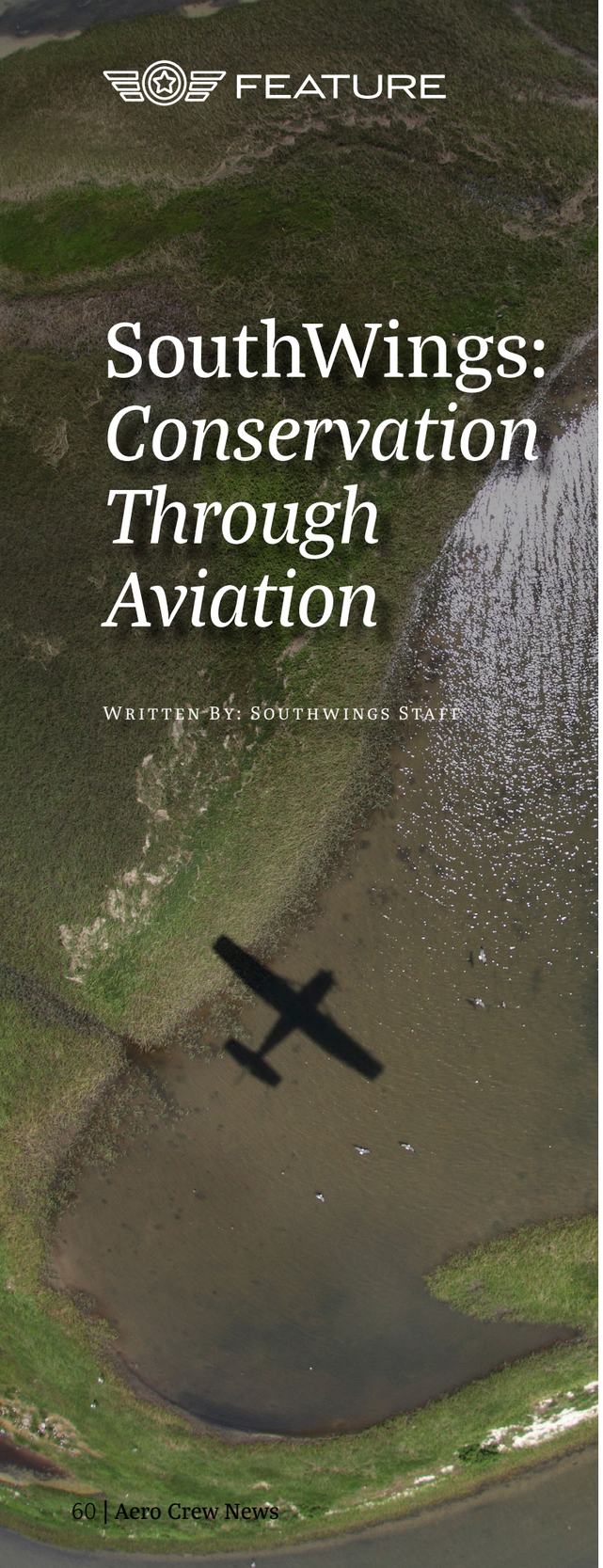
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FEATURE

SouthWings: *Conservation Through Aviation*

Written By: Southwings Staff

Laura Early sat in the FBO at the Brunswick Golden Isles airport, nervously awaiting someone she had never met, about to do something she had never done. She was still getting her feet under her as a new Waterkeeper, and one of her mentors was going to show her how to use a SouthWings flight. Jen Hilburn, then Altamaha Riverkeeper, frequently used SouthWings flights to gather important information to hold polluters accountable, particularly regarding coal ash ponds and the paper industry.

SouthWings Volunteer Pilot Woody Beck flew in from Athens, Georgia and walked into the FBO with a smile on his face and an Altamaha Riverkeeper hat on his head. He greeted them and explained that it was pretty windy that day and consequently, would be a bumpy flight.

SouthWings provides pro bono flights across the Southeast and Gulf by bringing together volunteer pilots, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and decision makers to provide one-of-a-kind aerial experiences. The flights offer a perspective that fosters understanding of the scale and the relationship of cumulative environmental effects, helping to better understand and solve the most pressing environmental issues facing the region.

Laura's charge was the Satilla River watershed, just south of the Altamaha. It flowed from Douglas, Ga. to the Atlantic Coast between Jekyll Island and Cumberland Island. In order to effectively protect the Satilla River watershed, she had to understand the river system and know what was happening throughout the watershed. This meant monitoring it from all angles, the ground, the water, and the air.

As they left the runway and climbed into the air, the interconnectedness of water on this coastal Georgia landscape was immediately evident. The tide came right up to the edges of industrial facilities, something you couldn't see from the water because of manmade berms just a few feet higher than the high tide. They flew south from the airport to the estuary in Camden County, where a man-made cut between the main channel of the Satilla River and tidal creeks had altered the hydrologic flow for decades. Aerial photos that Laura took on the flight would be used for years to illustrate the issue and advocate for ecological restoration, eventually resulting in a multimillion-dollar project to close the cut, return a natural tidal flow, and restore habitat. The efforts were supported by the local community as well as state and federal agencies.

Flying upriver from the mouth, the web of tidal creeks transitioned into a meandering blackwater river lined with cypress and tupelo. The view from 2000 feet above was something else entirely. Not only did it reveal the beauty of this river, but there was a spatial awareness that you can't get from ground level or a map.

Back on the ground in Brunswick, Woody helped Laura climb out of his Cessna 177. The abundance and connectedness of wetlands just beyond the rivers' banks that she viewed during the flight were what Laura would take with her as she continued her tenure as the Satilla Riverkeeper.

SouthWings Origin Story

SouthWings was co-founded in 1996 by friends and pilots Hume Davenport and Jay Mills. The former was a volunteer pilot for LightHawk, an organization based in the western U.S. dedicated to accelerating conservation success through the powerful perspective of flight. Davenport brought this idea back to the Southeast, and founded SouthWings along with Mills in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Together, they envisioned an organization that would use pilots and planes to document landscape-level environmental impacts in the Southeast.

"It was clear to me early on how important the aerial perspective is to winning over public opinion on conservation issues," says SouthWings founder Hume Davenport. "There is so much you cannot see from the ground that immediately becomes visible from a small aircraft."

The first initiative they sought to bring to the public's attention was extensive clear cutting on the Cumberland Plateau. Davenport flew monthly survey flights to determine sourcing areas and methods of a newly constructed wood chip mill which was cutting down the forests at alarming rates. Groups on the ground, like the Dogwood Alliance, had begun organizing around this issue and SouthWings was there to provide the aerial perspective.

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SouthWings Scope of Work

SouthWings' work began to expand to other conservation initiatives around the Southeast, and soon mountain top removal coal mining became a top focus of the organization. It's a destructive practice that poses significant public health risks and has destroyed over 500 mountains in Appalachia. Heavy explosives are used to blast off the mountain top in order to access the coal below. Flying over one of these sites can be an extremely impactful experience that can inspire individuals to pursue positive change.

As with deforestation and just about every other destructive environmental practice, it can be hard to see from a car or boat. Thin layers of forests can veil what lies just beyond. Seeing it from a plane not only reveals what is hidden but also helps to understand the scope and severity of an issue. "SouthWings flights afford us a perspective that we can't get from the ground or even by drone flights, revealing the scale of mountaintop removal and proximity to communities," says Vernon Haltom, executive director of Coal River Mountain Watch. Vernon flies several times a year with SouthWings volunteer pilots to monitor the activities at mountain top removal coal mining sites and report suspected permit violations to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. His videos provide transparency that neither the state agency nor the industry affords to the public.

Since the establishment of a Gulf Coast office in New Orleans during fall 2012, SouthWings has greatly enhanced its work to protect ecosystems, including promoting watershed health and preserving wildlife habitat in the Gulf region. Along the Gulf Coast, flight partners keep a watchful eye on chronic and intermittent oil leaks from abandoned and improperly maintained offshore oil platforms through the support of SouthWings volunteer pilots.

In 2010, SouthWings flights confirmed an ongoing spill from offshore oil wells owned by Taylor Energy. Subsequent flights documented visible oil polluting the Gulf of Mexico, which appeared to be substantially more than was being reported by the company or by regulators. From 2010 to 2023, SouthWings volunteer pilots conducted 35 flights over the site for partners seeking accountability. While other legal issues around the spill are unresolved, over a decade of hard work paid off in 2022 when Taylor Energy finally agreed to a settlement and to stop the spill.

Like the Satilla and Altamaha Riverkeepers, SouthWings flights support many Waterkeeper Alliance partners in monitoring watershed threats from urban development, livestock waste, coal ash, and other pollution sources. In one year alone, SouthWings flights enabled over 180 pollution reports to be filed with state and federal agencies to hold polluters accountable, and coverage of these flights in *Rolling Stone* and by *NPR* have brought these issues to national attention.

The Vision and Process

SouthWings envisions the Southeast as a landscape of healthy communities that value and cooperatively steward natural, cultural, and economic resources. SouthWings helps ensure that the region's unique identity and globally significant biodiversity are held in trust for current and future generations.

This vision becomes a reality by crafting flight experiences that provide passengers with the inspiration and evidence needed to protect and restore ecosystems and communities that are facing





environmental threats. SouthWings has flown thousands of individuals and organizations to gather relevant data, determine the best strategies to solve environmental problems, and target individuals with the greatest potential to influence positive change—from reporters and photographers to legislators and community leaders. The tool of flight is a capacity builder, and any group, no matter how large or small can request a flight from SouthWings.

Once a flight request is received, SouthWings program directors begin the collaborative process of flight planning. This involves conversations with the flight partners to identify points of interest and devise a flight path. Each flight request needs to have a clear objective and expected outcome, though it is understood that flight results may not be immediate or easily measurable. With the flight details identified, the program director will reach out to volunteer pilots to identify the best fit.

Time and again, passengers report back to SouthWings that the flight experience was illuminating, motivating and most importantly, helpful to their work. Partner organizations use flight data and/or photos in public presentations, online media, or campaign materials to educate their membership and the general public about critical environmental issues. And they come back for more. The majority of passengers on SouthWings flights have flown with the organization multiple times.

The Volunteer Pilots

SouthWings is a proud member of the Air Care Alliance and the nationwide network of Volunteer Pilot Organizations that engage in public-benefit flying by providing crucial aerial support to causes that make a difference. At the heart of the work is the commitment of SouthWings' all-volunteer pilot corps, collectively contributing hundreds of hours of time and resources each year to provide a unique perspective on environmental issues that would otherwise not be possible.

SouthWings is able to offer these flights free of charge because of the incredible generosity and passion of the volunteer pilots who are the heart and soul of this organization. There are currently 81 volunteer pilots on the active roster throughout the SouthWings service area, which encompasses 15 states throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed, Appalachia, the East Coast into the northern half of Florida, and the Gulf states as far as coastal Texas. SouthWings pilots fly all types of aircraft: SEL, a few twin engines, seaplanes, and helicopters are in the fleet.

In addition to their skills as pilots, many SouthWings' volunteers bring extensive knowledge of conservation issues from their jobs in biology and environmental science or from other volunteer work as board members of groups like American Rivers, or local watershed and land protection organizations. Other SouthWings volunteer pilots are experts in the fields of engineering, law and medicine, and several are full time airline pilots who relish the chance to fly GA on their days off. Without a dedicated corps of volunteers, none of SouthWings' work would be possible.

The purpose of a SouthWings flight is not to get from point A to point B, but rather to study what is on the ground, often circling points and flying low and slow to get photo documentation. SouthWings volunteer pilots often report that the flying required











on a SouthWings flight is the most fun type of flying they do. Beyond that, it brings a great sense of pride knowing that they are doing something positive with their flying.

Volunteer Pilot Doug Oakley framed it this way, “I would tell new recruits the quiet feeling of accomplishment when I saw a story on coal ash ponds, wood pellet exporting, the red wolf reintroduction in N.C., and let’s not forget the CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation) stories—all of these make me proud to have flown for something my wife and I believe in. I could not fly for the $100 hamburger without feeling I should have used that time and money to scout out the Cape Fear River or circle some CAFO sites and put some real purpose behind my flying.”

Pilot Requirements

As a volunteer-based organization, the first requirement to join SouthWings as a pilot is one who is willing to cover the cost of flight, including fuel. There would be no SouthWings if not for the generosity of its volunteer pilots. A pilot must also have at least 750 PIC hours. With this much experience, a pilot will have reached a level of comfort with the specific type of flying that is required on a SouthWings flight—repeated circling and maneuvering to view specific points on the ground. While many SouthWings pilots are IFR rated, it is not a requirement. SouthWings flights are scheduled for good weather VFR days for optimal ground visibility.

Beyond this basic requirement, one must maintain a valid pilot and medical certificates (or BasicMed), and own or have access to a regular category single- or multi-engine land or seaplane, or a helicopter.

SouthWings does not arrange flights in ultra-light, experimental, or homebuilt aircraft. Adequate liability insurance is required, and a pilot will be asked to name SouthWings as additional insured on one’s policy.

Pilots interested in signing up can fill out an inquiry form on SouthWings’ website and a staff member will reach out to begin the conversation. After an initial phone call, the pilot will be invited to complete an application and submit accompanying documentation. Once everything is in hand, an orientation call will take place and then the pilot will be ready to accept a flight request.

30 Years of SouthWings

SouthWings is celebrating 30 years of providing the tool of flight to environmental initiatives in the Southeast. At the start of this year, Co-Founder Hume Davenport stepped down as board chair and longtime Volunteer Pilot and Board Member, Hap Endler, took the helm. A graduate of Appalachian State University and a former U.S. Navy aviator, Endler brings a lifetime of flight experience and a passion for meaningful service to his work with SouthWings.

Endler first became involved with SouthWings after a chance conversation with Davenport—a conversation that Endler recounts with a smile, saying Davenport “strong-armed me into SouthWings.” He has served on the SouthWings Board of Directors since 2013 and has been a dedicated volunteer pilot since 2008, flying scores of missions that have helped partners better understand and respond to environmental challenges.

“Hap’s deep connection to SouthWings and to our mission makes him a natural leader for our organization,” said SouthWings Executive Director Meredith Dowling.

Hap owns and flies a Cessna 182 out of the Asheville Airport, and he relishes the opportunity to put passengers in a position to see the mountains, wetlands, and waterways of the Southeast from a perspective few get to experience.

Reflecting on his new role, Hap shared, “I’m honored to take over the chairmanship of this 30-year-old organization. SouthWings has always been about showing up for communities and using aviation as a force for good, and I’m excited to help guide the organization into its next chapter.”

The victories over the past 30 years are what propels SouthWings into the future and keeps their volunteer pilots and staff looking forward to 30 more years of conservation through aviation.

About the Organization

SouthWings is a 501c3 non profit based in Asheville, NC that advocates for the restoration and protection of ecosystems across the Southeast through flight.
Read More...

Thank you to all the WAI attendees who took the time to speak to me about Aero Crew News.

-Craig



A warm welcome from Women in Aviation International



Telex - Dan Miller and Kate-Madonna Quast



FlexJet- From left to right: Beverly Kiefner, Francisco Rios, Taylor Moore, Micah Starkey, Reagan Davis, Nora Cole, Susan Miller, Lea Peters, Kelly Sandusky, Sandy Caroll, Mariel Aquino, Kari Jones
Back-middle three: Gheorghe Ciobanu, Sarah LaPray, Jim Dunn

Flexjet was honored to attend the 37th Annual Women in Aviation International Conference in Grapevine, Texas. Our Talent Acquisition team and pilots engaged with an exceptional community of aviation professionals, sharing what it means to build a career defined by excellence, precision, and purpose.



Flight Uniform - Stephanie Barclay and Heather Jaffa



Leading Edge Financial Planning - Kelly Broderick, Brenda Heim de Queiroz Hill and Charlie Mattingly



GoJet Airlines - Kelly, Myrna, Lindsey, Kali, Kate, Shaddi, Forrest
Pilots: Daryll, Lisa, Justine, and Miranda



Rendezvous App - Whitt H., Mellisa Whitfield, Brentin Wilson
Rendezvous is the world's most powerful layover networking platform — tactical social, built for the sky. Born from a simple truth that aircrew aviation has been ignored for decades: pilots and flight attendants are among the most well-traveled people on the planet, yet they've never had a platform built specifically for the way they live, move, and connect. Rendezvous changes that. By syncing crew schedules in real time, the app surfaces who's in the same city, on the same layover, at the same moment — turning dead hours between flights into genuine connection, local exploration, and professional community. It is not a generic social network retrofitted for aviation. It was conceived, designed, and backed by aircrew who understood the rhythms, the irregular hours, the 3 AM van rides, and the loneliness of a solo layover in a city full of colleagues you never knew were there. Available now at gotrendezvous.com, Rendezvous is the professional network aviation has always needed — finally built by the only people qualified to build it.



ATP - Dawson Furber, Amira Hindi, Makayla Shoulders, Marty Cates, and Angela Hubbard



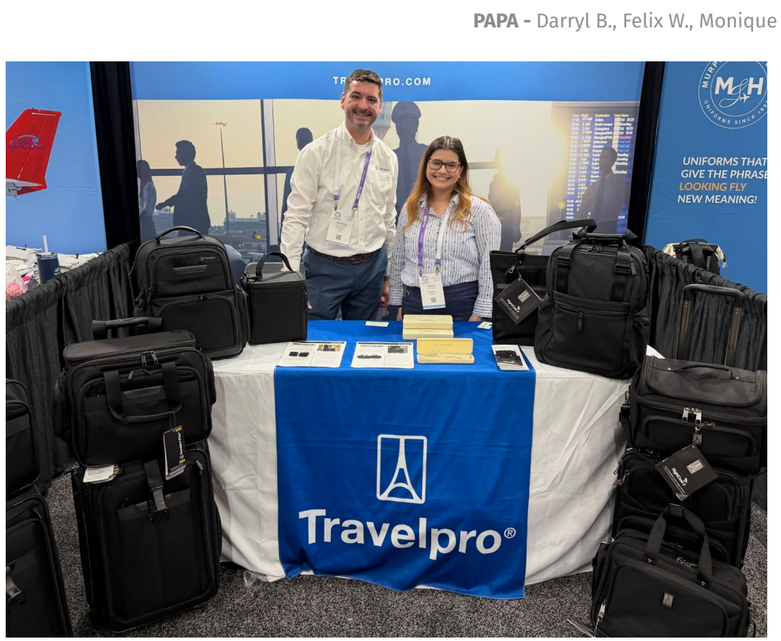
PEA - Jamie Brown, Kat Guarneri, Amelie Coleman
We're proud to represent a dynamic aviation education network that connects every stage of the journey from first discovery to career launch. The PEA Group (The Professional Educators in Aviation Group) features Phoenix East Aviation, Superior Flight School, A&P Mechanic Institute, Wayman College of Aeronautics, and MzeroA Online Ground School. Our collective mission is to empower the next generation of aviation professionals by covering all aspects of the industry, including pilot training, aircraft maintenance, academic pathways, and online ground education. Together, we create a seamless pipeline of support and opportunity, helping students take their next step with confidence no matter where they are in their aviation journey.



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PAPA - Darryl B., Felix W., Monique I., and Eugene A.



Travel Pro - Jeromy Welch, and Kiara Galindo



Kalitta Air - Steve Vette, Aisha Alexander, Sam Rippey, and Megan Hayden



Cirrus - Josh Fischmann, Erin LaPlante, Savannah Kay, Christyn Buchholz, Laura Henry, Hailey Nash, Angie Hunt, Paige Kirkland, and Brannon Muska

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Air Transport



JS Firm - Lauren Miller, Abbey Hutter - Executive Director Marketing Specialist, Emily Palmer - Enterprise Account Executive
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