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Contact:

Helen Hagg

Women in Aviation Great Lakes Chapter President

waigreatlakes@gmail.com

(502) 472-0579

2019 Women's Aviation Career Symposium Press Release

The second annual Women's Aviation Career Symposium (WACS) was held January 26 in Lansing, Michigan. Over 50 women from the mid-Michigan area attended the event which was founded by three women aviators, Helen Hagg, Mary Poirier, and Pam Tobin, all current or retired corporate pilots. The idea for the event came about as a way to alleviate the industry-wide pilot and mechanic shortage.

Dean Walters, one of the event sponsors, cited an article from the Aviation International News (AIN): *Female fliers hold the key to solving the pilot shortage*. Women are an untapped portion of many industries. The article states that women make up 47 percent of the total workforce. But professional female pilots constitute 5 percent of the piloting workforce, a statistic that has remained unmoved in four decades.

"Our goal is to encourage women to '*aspire for even higher*'. We want to show these ladies that they can accomplish anything and that there are many different careers in aviation that they may not even know about yet. There is also over \$6.1 million available in scholarships every year- that's a lot of free money out there which can help accomplish dreams," said Helen Hagg. [For the list of scholarships compiled by the Women in Aviation Great Lakes Chapter visit www.tinyurl.com/aviationscholarshiplist].

WACS attendees were able to meet and network with over 25 aviation professional women who are corporate and airline pilots, military personnel, mechanics, air traffic controllers, seamstresses, ground handlers, and flight attendants. Round table discussion panels were held in the morning where attendees could ask questions about different careers and learn about the everyday life of each panelist.

The six-panel topics were pilot, mechanic, family, military, ground support, and career choices. Following the discussion time, attendees were able to tour corporate jets and visit booths from many local aviation companies and schools. Keynote speaker, Adlay Kejjan, gave an inspirational talk about her life as a Syrian refugee and the obstacles she had to overcome to become a pilot, Certified Flight Instructor, and paramedic, which included learning English and keeping her flight career a secret from her family for seven years.

This year the WACS were able to award not one, as originally planned, but two \$1000 scholarships for aviation education thanks to generous donations from their sponsors: Jackson National, GrandAir Aviation, Western Michigan University, Mead and Hunt, Satcom Direct, and Flight Management Corporation. Scholarships were awarded to Michelle Blanks and Melissa

Smith. Following the event, the attendees were able to tour the Air Traffic Control Tower at the Lansing Airport.

“We hope to award more scholarships next year and expand this event. Our main focus is to tell these awesome women that they can aspire for higher,” said Mary Poirier.

This event was considered to be a great success and an excellent opportunity for women to network and pursue careers in aviation.

For more information regarding next year's event contact Helen Hagg at wacsmichigan@gmail.com.

The Women in Aviation, International Great Lakes Chapter is a group of women and men based in the Mid-Michigan area. Our mission is to connect, engage, and inspire people to explore aviation. For more information contact waigreatlakes@gmail.com.