

2022 Girls In Aviation Day Ignites Passion For Flight And More

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CAHOKIA HEIGHTS/SAUGET - More than 100 young women from a dozen bi-state area high schools and Girl Scout Troop 2184 learned about a variety of future careers in aviation during the Girls in Aviation Day event held at St. Louis Downtown Airport on October 28. The participants climbed into the cockpits of various aircraft for a unique vantage point and an overview of the instrumentation, and they flew planes in high-tech

simulators that enabled them to safely experience the thrill of flight. Saint Louis University's Oliver L. Parks Department of Aviation Science hosted the event at the airport, which is located near downtown St. Louis and has been home to the nation's oldest flight school for decades.

"This event is a great opportunity to introduce the aviation industry to young ladies," said Stephen Magoc, MBA, Chair of Saint Louis University's Oliver L. Parks Department of Aviation Science (SLU). "Most know it's a male-dominated industry, and we think it's important to open these young ladies' eyes to the opportunities that are out there for them. We've got students who come in as freshmen and tell us they went to a Girls in Aviation event and that's where they learned about the opportunities."

In addition to the hands-on activities, the event featured a career expo, where students had the opportunity to connect with representatives from more than a dozen organizations in the aviation industry about different job opportunities and the paths leading to them. Garmin, Greater St. Louis Business Aviation Association, Federal Aviation Administration, Ideal Aviation, SLU Admissions, St. Louis Downtown Airport, KSTL Air Traffic Control, St. Louis-Lambert International Airport, SLU Aviation Student Organizations, Southwestern Illinois College, Take Flight Girls, Inc., Transportation Security Administration, and the United States Army were among those investing their time to spotlight the world of opportunities in the industry. Ideal Aviation, St. Louis Downtown Airport Fire and Rescue and SLU provided the static displays of planes and the firetruck that participants got to see up close. Garmin, Ideal Aviation, St. Louis Lambert International Airport, the Greater St. Louis Business Aviation Association and Gateway Jets sponsored this year's event.

Addalyn Ruesing, 15, a sophomore at Mehlville High School, was excited to visit the flight simulation room and to try something she'd never done before. "It was pretty fun. I thought it was really realistic; like what you'd really see in a plane," said Addalyn, who came to the event without any expectations as to what she might discover. "I'm learning all about the job opportunities and careers in aviation and hearing there or lots of opportunities for women. I'd definitely look into it now."

Alicia Thomas brought her two children to the event – her daughter Lailah Kelly, a 14-year-old freshman student at Cardinal Ritter High School, and her 18-month-old son Major Thomas. While both enjoyed time in the cockpit of one of the planes used by SLU's flight instructors, Thomas said she made the trip primarily to expose her daughter to the career opportunities the aviation sector holds for young women.

Amy Pries, Outreach Coordinator for SLU's School of Science and Engineering, said that is exactly the goal of events like Girls in Aviation. She said it aimed at introducing more young women to the fields of aviation and aerospace, where there is currently tremendous demand for pilots, engineers and various other positions.



“We hope to introduce young women of all backgrounds to new aspects of aviation,” said Pries. “If they want to be a pilot, we want to support that. If they want to do something else in the industry, we want to support that as well. The airline industry and aviation industry at large is not very diverse and it has an opportunity to continue to grow and become more equitable, and there is a place for everyone.”

To help bring those opportunities to life for the students, the event featured a keynote address by Kat Charnal, a flight attendant and pilot in training for Delta Airlines.

“I love to push aviation because of the fact that being a pilot, a flight attendant, an aircraft maintenance technician; they’re all skills that most companies are looking for

and they don't have a lot of trained people to hire. There's so much value to acquiring those skills," Charnal said. Her key message for participants was to never give up.

"Anything you want to do, anything you set your eyes on, go for it. Don't let the finances stop you. Don't allow the nay-sayers to tell you that you can't do it. Don't allow anything inside of you – you can sometimes be your own worst critic – stop you from pursuing your passions," Charnal said. "I've had that happen to me where I questioned if I was even smart enough to be a pilot, but why was I questioning my own intelligence? I know that I'm intelligent and I know I can do whatever I put my mind to. Don't let anything stop you from accomplishing your goals and achieving your dreams."

A panel discussion with current aviation students at SLU gave the students a chance to hear from other young women who were in the early stages of embarking on a variety of aviation industry careers. Ellie Volansky, an Aviation Management Major and Flight Science Minor, shared her words of encouragement.

"If you know in your heart it's what you want to do and you're passionate about it, you have to tune out the noise. At the end of the day, it's going to pay off. Just keep pushing and surround yourself with the people and voices who do support you," said Volansky.

St. Louis Downtown Airport Director Sandra Shore was pleased to see such a great turn out for the event.

"I could not be more excited about it, especially being a female in aviation myself," Shore said. "The variety of jobs available is a too well-kept secret. Not everybody is a pilot; we have firefighters, airport operations, aircraft mechanics, TSA. In Illinois, alone, it's a \$96 billion industry and that means plenty of jobs and plenty open jobs. We don't have the pipeline of individuals interested in aviation careers to fill future demand, so getting young students interested is just the seed that we plant that hopefully will change that."

Schools in southwestern Illinois and eastern Missouri that had students attending Girls in Aviation Day included Belleville West Township, Cahokia High School-Cahokia CUSD 187, Cardinal Ritter College Prep, Lutheran High School St. Charles County, Madison Senior High School, Marian Middle School, Mehlville High School, Ritenour High School, Roosevelt High School, St. Margaret of Scotland, Sumner High School, University City High School, and Webster Groves High School. Photos from the event are posted on <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjAfnXr>.

To learn more about Girls in Aviation Day or opportunities to participate in future events, contact Amy Preis at Saint Louis University's Oliver L. Parks Department of Aviation Science via email at sseoutreach@slu.edu.

St. Louis Downtown Airport is owned and operated by Bi-State Development. It is located a few minutes east of downtown St. Louis in Illinois on 1,000 acres in Cahokia Heights and Sauget.

