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Contact: Helen Hagg

wacsmichigan@gmail.com

502-472-0579

CAREERS AND OPPORTUNITIES DISCOVERED AT THE 8TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S AVIATION CAREER SYMPOSIUM (WACS)

BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN, February 28, 2026 –The Women's Aviation Career Symposium (WACS) celebrated their eighth year that included over 225 participants and over \$53,000 in scholarships awarded to women pursuing careers in aviation. The annual professional career conference for women – from high school juniors through retirees – took place at Western Michigan University's College of Aviation.



WACS brought together students, industry leaders, and aviation professionals to inspire, educate, and connect women interested in pursuing aviation careers. The event provided networking, mentoring, and career development opportunities while showcasing pathways in commercial, corporate, and general aviation.

“WACS is a day of discovery, education, networking, and opportunities,” said Pam Catlin, co-organizer of the event.

The WACS conference showcased 47 aviation companies, schools, and organizations from the Great Lakes region. WACS awarded \$53,700 to 12 women for maintenance and flight training. Diamond Sponsor **Flight Safety International** awarded a Corporate Cabin Attendant Scholarship and a Learjet 40/45 Maintenance Initial Training Scholarship valued at over \$21,000. Since its inception in 2018, WACS has provided \$215,700 in scholarships to 82 women.



Fifty-four companies sponsored this year's event, including Gulfstream Aerospace, Flight Safety International, Western Michigan University (WMU), Michigan Business Aviation Association (MBAA), Duncan Aviation, MASCO, Amway, Dassault Falcon Jet, DIMOR Group (WACO), The Dow Chemical Company, GrandAir Aviation, Francine and Theo Hagg, Pro Star Aviation, and more. Thirteen new sponsors and organizations participated in the event.

Sponsors were invited to the industry discussion which offered a dedicated forum for employers to engage with one another and discuss industry needs, trends, and opportunities.

Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and learn about the everyday life and experiences of professional women panelists representing many different careers.

"It's so inspiring to see so many women passionate about aviation and aerospace! And equally inspiring seeing so many companies and sponsors willing to support and hire them!" said Mary Poirier, co-founder of WACS.

The event featured professional development workshops and provided valuable information to attendees on numerous topics including scholarship applications, internship opportunities, resume writing and review, airline pilot pathways, and careers in maintenance. Hands-on aircraft simulator sessions in a Cirrus G7 Series single-engine aircraft and a Piper Seminole multi-engine aircraft inspired future pilots to see themselves as the captain of their

careers. Attendees were also able to tour aircraft and the Western Michigan University College of Aviation.

“Every year we see the excitement and encouragement on the faces of our attendees as they seize new opportunities,” said Helen Hagg, co-founder of WACS. “This gives us much joy and makes this conference so valuable to the next generation in aviation.”



WACS Team (L to R): Emily Cemazar, Mary Poirier, Helen Hagg, Pam Catlin

The event concluded with keynote speaker, Sarah Kalmeta, founder of Pivot Point International and a leadership catalyst and aviation strategist. Sarah inspired and encouraged attendees to pursue careers in aviation and embrace pivoting to new courses throughout their life.

“Your career will not go according to plan and that’s exactly why you will succeed. Reframing changed everything for me. The beautiful thing about aviation and aerospace is the flexibility, we must try new things and move into new spaces,” said Sarah.

“Careers are not built on perfection; they are built on pivots. When you are willing to move with the change, adaptability becomes your superpower. Because you’re willing to move when others might be stuck, you can also lead the change. This willingness will launch your career and support future pivots.”



WACS Team and Keynote Speaker (L to R): Emily Cemazar, Mary Poirier, Sarah Kalmeta, Pam Catlin, Helen Hagg

ABOUT WACS

WACS was founded in 2018, and its mission is to create a pipeline for the aviation and aerospace industries in Michigan and surrounding states by providing networking opportunities for companies and those pursuing aviation careers. This is done by promoting local companies, organizations, resources, and schools in an effort to keep top talent in the region. Through scholarships, recipients are able to further their training, and companies looking to hire have the ability to tap into a great pool of candidates. In 2024, WACS began a new partnership with the Michigan Business Aviation Association (MBAA) and their non-profit organization, the Michigan Business Aviation Foundation (MBAF). With the help of their team and network, WACS is able to expand outreach to more businesses, as well as new attendees, in our region. In 2019, the team was awarded the Michigan Aeronautics Commission (MAC) Award of Excellence.

Save the date: Next year WACS will be held on March 20, 2027. For more information, visit www.mibaa.org/wacs

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