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Aviation for Women
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Girls in Aviation Day 2017 reaches 9,700!

4 Women running aeronautical cities

Hurricane watching from the sky

NOAA women
Four women in charge of their own aeronautical cities and why they think they have the best jobs in aviation

When asked to name an aviation career, typically “pilot” comes to mind, but the aviation community offers so many other jobs—some you may not have considered. One such career is as an airport manager. Here are four women who have worked their way up through the airport hierarchy to make them the boss at their particular airports. We caught up with each one and asked them about their work and motivations.

Compiled by Patricia Luebke

TANYA WOODWARD
WAI 3722, Airport Manager
Culpeper Regional Airport (KCJR)
Culpeper, Virginia

When you were a little girl, did you play “airport” instead of “house”? In other words, what was your path to becoming an airport manager?

When I was young I wanted to be a teacher, but as I matured aviation became very important to me. When we moved to within five minutes of Culpeper Airport, my dad said that my parents chose the house because of the close proximity to the airport and train tracks because, “There is nothing more soothing than to hear a train in the distance and the hum of an airplane engine in the sky.” After my first flight at Culpeper Airport when I was 17, little did I know that my life would take me in a roundabout way to aviation. My parents encouraged me to get my degree and, if I wanted, to go into the military as an officer. I graduated Culpeper County High School in 1989 and started college while working. I worked some odd jobs, and then in 1991 there was an opening for data entry clerk at the Culpeper Airport. I interviewed and was hired. I graduated from the University of Mary Washington in 1997. Yes, it took me eight years to get my four-year degree while working my way through, and I am still here 26 years later, only now I am the manager.
What’s a great day at work?
Every day is different. Some days you know what you are going to do, and some days everything else gets done but what you need to do. Those days when the weather is perfect and people are flying and enjoying themselves—buying plenty of fuel—makes for a great day as well for the airport. It really makes me pinch myself and wonder how I got so blessed to have such an awesome job.

Your airport has a free annual air show for the community. What is your role as the airport manager at Culpeper Air Fest?
I have the title of the air fest coordinator/airport manager, but that really means that I take care of anything and everything that comes down the pike on that day. We plan and plan, but on that day we are all in the trenches working to make the show appear seamless to the crowd.

What’s a typical problem that arises at the airport where you sigh and say, “Here we go again...”?
We currently have 140 hangars on the field. We just added 32 of those hangars, and they are all full and we still have a waiting list. I always want to help the customers, and I feel bad when we can’t accommodate everyone who wants to be based here.

In your email signature box, you have this quote: “The airport runway is the most important main street in any town.” What does your airport mean to the citizens of Culpeper?
We are a thread that helps unify and serve this community. Because of this airport, the community has many businesses that have relocated to this area, which provide a livelihood for many families. We have aviation training here whether you want to be a private pilot or a more advanced rating. We also have a program to train youth to be airplane mechanics. We participate in local events with fly-overs, and host events of our own such as our annual Culpeper Air Fest. Local fire/rescue and K-9 units utilize the field for training. We are a lifeline when disaster hits a rural area. We are many things to many people.

Finish the sentence, “If you want to be an airport manager, you need to be...”
Flexible! The job comes with many hats: caretaker, financier, construction worker, planner, janitor, landlord, line tech, master of ceremonies, etc.

MELISSA W. COOPER
Airport Manager, Charles B. Wheeler Downtown Airport (MKC)
Kansas City, Missouri

Your airport is connected to Charles Lindbergh. Tell us about that.
On August 17, we celebrated the 90th anniversary of Charles Lindbergh’s
dedication of the Kansas City Municipal Airport. The location of the airport was selected since it was only a few minutes from the downtown business district. Upon landing the Spirit of St. Louis on the dirt at the north end of the field, Lindbergh stated that, “Kansas City has the opportunity for one of the best airports in this country.”

Your airport is one of a few remaining airports that is really downtown. Is that a good thing, or does it present unusual problems for an airport?

The proximity of the airport to the downtown business district has been the primary reason for MKC’s success during the past 90 years as we serve the needs of the corporations doing business in Kansas City. In an intentional effort to revitalize Kansas City’s downtown area, the landscape of the city has changed dramatically in the past decade with an increase in residential, entertainment, and business development. One of my key roles as the airport manager is to work in partnership with the community to encourage and promote growth while protecting the airport, specifically in regards to airspace obstruction and instrument approaches.

Your airport has FBOs from two national chains. Given the often-controversial nature of FBO fuel prices and ramp fees, does having two FBOs provide competition and make a difference?

It is the mission of MKC to provide an airport that exceeds the needs of our general aviation customers. One of the ways this is accomplished is by having the opportunity to experience top-quality service from Atlantic Aviation and Signature Flight Support at a price that is competitive within the region. The fact that both FBOs are national chains provides aircraft owners and operators the capabilities to enjoy the benefits of potential customer agreements at other airports within the National Airspace System. Additionally, the city of Kansas City, Missouri, owns and operates a 100LL self-service fuel pump offering a third option.

Rumor has it that your airport is the only one in the country that has an enormous Hereford cow standing guard over the approach to the runway. True?

I am not sure if we are the only airport, but Kansas City does have iconic cow art that overlooks the city and the airport.

Name one of the job functions of an airport manager that may surprise us.

On any given day, I am faced with the responsibility of making decisions and determinations on behalf of Kansas City on topics to include operational and maintenance concerns such as wildlife, pavement maintenance, security, construction, and utility service; administrative concerns such as legislation, finance, and commercial development; and regulatory concerns to include environmental and safety requirements. In order to have any level of success, an airport manager must have a desire and ability to continually learn and develop professional relationships with experts in different facets of the job. I am blessed to be surrounded by a community of talented and knowledgeable coworkers, stakeholders, and mentors who have continued to provide support in my daily endeavors in the ever-changing world of airport management.

How did you develop an interest in aviation?

My interest in airports grew out of my passion for travel. I have always appreciated
Internships at an airport are a great way for people to get a foot in the door.

the role aviation plays in the world economy and in connecting people.

What advice would you give to someone interested in a career in airport management? Course of study in college? Entry-level jobs?

There are so many different facets to airport management. Airports are small cities. So, an individual can major in airport management or follow a path in a specific discipline like finance, accounting, planning, or marketing. Internships at an airport are a great way for people to get a foot in the door.

What is an ideal day when you are president/CEO of an airport authority?

An ideal day is when we are recognizing a member of the airport staff or an airline employee for exceptional customer service. Travel is stressful, and the airport staff makes it a point to put enjoyment back into travel. We have a Kindness Takes Flight team that does random acts of kindness, and 25 dog teams in the Paws 4 Passenger Program.

What is a part of your job responsibilities that may surprise us?

There is probably nothing that would surprise you about my job responsibilities! No day is the same at an airport.

You will be speaking at the International Women in Aviation Conference in Reno in March 2018. Can you give us an insider’s tip on how to have a good time in Reno?

There is so much to do in the Reno-Tahoe area. You can ski and snowboard in our backyard at Mt. Rose or take a 45-minute trip to Lake Tahoe to enjoy outdoor activities and the beauty of the lake. The Harrah’s Auto Collection should not be missed nor the Nevada Museum of Art. Take time to enjoy the casinos or the fine restaurants and bars throughout the city.

SCHOLLON STANLEY
Airport Director
Guthrie Edmond Regional Airport (KGOK)
Guthrie, Oklahoma

What path did you take to become an airport manager?

I’ve had a love for aviation as long as I can remember and have been actively involved in aviation since 1995. I earned my pilot certificate and aviation management degree from the University of Oklahoma and began working as airport staff assistant at the Max Westheimer Airport in Norman, Oklahoma, in 2004. Some 10 months later, I was promoted to airport operations officer. Shortly thereafter, I joined the Oklahoma Airport Operators Association (OAOA) and served as president and remain actively involved in that organization. In 2013, I earned my master’s degree in aviation management from Oklahoma State University and then, two years later, I accepted the position of airport director for the Guthrie Edmond Regional Airport in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

What is the economic impact of your airport on the community?

Just recently the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission (OAC), in partnership with the FAA and communities across Oklahoma, conducted a Statewide Aviation Economic Impact Study. The study measured the annual economic impact of each airport, expressed in terms of annual jobs supported, payroll associated with these jobs, and annual economic activity or output generated by the airport. The Guthrie Edmond Regional Airport has a total annual economic impact of over $19 million, and supports over 195 jobs in the community with a total annual payroll of $7.7 million. These are attributable reflecting both direct and indirect/induced impact.

What’s the best part about being an airport manager?

I think one of the best parts is waking up every morning excited about going to work. I love being able to say, “I get to go to the airport today!” I love what I do. I love the sound of airplane engines, the smell of jet fuel, and radial engines buzzing around the airport.
I often have the opportunity of inspiring children of all ages who come to the various events at the airport and hearing all the wonderful stories from airport tenants on how they got involved in aviation, never knowing from day to day who’s going to fly in or who I might meet. I can truly say I’m living the dream, a dream I’ve had for a very long time.

**What advice would you give to someone starting out in a career in airport management?**

The aviation industry is a close-knit community, so get to know someone in the industry and make him or her your mentor. Every failure is a lesson, and if you’re not willing to fail, you are not ready to succeed. Choose to be positive, always have a grateful attitude, and never ever give up on your dreams.

**You describe your airport as “beautiful.” Tell us about it.**

I am so blessed by the beauty that surrounds this general aviation airport of 129 based aircraft. As I stand out on the end of the runway, I’m in awe of the city of Guthrie nestled below the airport. You can see for miles—the sun shining, the blue skies and big white puffy clouds, and tree-filled, green rolling hills. However, the real beauty of it is being a part of this unique partnership between the cities of Guthrie and Edmond, and seeing the positive attitudes of the surrounding communities who continue to work together to make this airport great. I like to think of our airport as the front door to our communities and the gateway to the world.

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