

# LIFT

SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | VOL. 10 | ISSUE 1



## Wings of Hope Gala Hits New Heights

The Wings of Hope Soaring to New Heights Gala presented by FabickCat lived up to its name on Saturday, April 6, when 225 guests gathered at the Hilton St. Louis Frontenac to celebrate the organization's mission-critical work of changing and saving lives through the power of aviation.

Emcee and Chief Pilot Dick Horowitz kept the crowd entertained and kept the laughs coming with his high-flying charm and aviation humor.

Successful silent and live auctions, along with generous event sponsorships, generated significant funds to support the services and programs that fuel the Wings of Hope mission — and families who have benefited from those services were in attendance, adding more meaning to every dollar raised.

Former Wings of Hope patient, Cortney McKenna, shared how the nonprofit's free flights back and forth to the Mayo Clinic for treatment of brain cancer helped her achieve remission and start a family as mom to two-year-old Mac.

"It has been four years since my most recent battle with brain cancer," she said. "My cancer remains stable, and I get my scans locally and sent to Mayo Clinic every three months. Even though my cancer is incurable, my doctors are very optimistic. I am also really thriving in my real estate career. Life is good!"



*Changing & Saving Lives  
Through the Power of Aviation*

## Bud Donovan & Jerry Fay The Story of Two Pilots Who Delivered Wings of Hope's First Plane to Kenya

*Thank you to Elizabeth Donovan (Bud Donovan's widow), Courtney Lemus (Bud Donovan's daughter) and Marianna Scheller (Jerry Fay's daughter) for sharing their recollections of Bud Donovan and Jerry Fay and providing source material and photos for this story.*

**W**e trace the history of Wings of Hope to the delivery of a Piper Super Cub to a group of missionaries — and one flying nun — working in Kenya in the early 1960s.

Here is the story of two friends who helped raise the money for that first plane and coordinated its delivery to Nairobi in the spring of 1963.

It all started in 1962 when Pacific Northern Airlines Captain Jerry Fay learned that Bishop Joseph Houlihan of the Medical Missionaries of Mary was seeking an airplane to help deliver medicine, food and other supplies to famine-stricken communities in the Turkana desert in Kenya.

Fay approached his friend and fellow Pacific Northern Airlines pilot, Bud Donovan to join him in raising money for a Piper Super Cub. "Supplying the little plane to the good sisters wasn't as easy as it sounds," Fay wrote in his 1988 book, "From A-3 to A-10."

In addition to securing the \$11,000 to buy the plane — some \$10,000 of which Fay paid out of

his own pocket — getting the plane to Africa required shipping it in a crate to Norfolk, Va., where the U.S. Navy agreed to carry it by ship to Naples, Italy. From there, the U.S. Air Force would transport the aircraft in a large cargo plane to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where Donovan would be waiting to ferry the plane to its final destination in Nairobi, Kenya.

These carefully coordinated plans hit a few snags that almost derailed the entire effort. First, the Cuban Missile Crisis called the U.S. Navy ship into service, delaying the plane's transport to Naples. Then, on the plane's short stop in Ethiopia, local officials attempted to extort a \$100,000 "transit tax" on the plane.

The journey's success required the duo to implement what they called their Plan B, which Fay described in his book as, "If all else fails, get up early and get the hell outa town."

That's exactly what Donovan did when he learned of the bogus tax on the Super Cub, which he thought was a ploy by Ethiopian officials to impound the little plane and keep it for themselves.

Fay wrote of Donovan's quick exit from Addis Ababa: "The following morning, he left the hotel at a very early hour, taxied to the small airport where the ship was tied down, and then, aided by friends who must forever go unnamed, readied the ship and... 'got the hell outa town.'"



Jerry Fay and his wife, Ruth, when they worked together at Pan American World Airways.

Not only did Donovan and Fay deliver the plane, they also built the landing strip for it which Fay described in a May 1975 Air Line Pilot magazine article: "I carved out a little airstrip, which wasn't much of a project. But there was no hangar, no facilities, no gas, not a damn thing ... It was starting from basic scratch."

Elizabeth Donovan, Bud's widow, said the two pilots complemented one another. At 6-foot-4, the 27-year-old Donovan was the more physical of the two. Fay, in his 40s, also worked on clearing the airstrip but was more adept at raising support and funds for the cause.

"They were a great team," she said. "One was good at the physical part of the operation, and



Bud Donovan as a young pilot.

(continued)



one was good at the organization. Jerry wrote the letters, and Bud built the runway."

Both men shared a genuine love for helping people.

"They just did it from their heart. They wanted to help people — they didn't want press or glory," Elizabeth said.

Despite their humility around the work they were doing, they did receive press and an audience with and medal of recognition from Pope John XXIII.

Fay's youngest, his daughter Marianna Scheller, recalls her dad being "generous to a fault."

While she was too young to remember much of what her father did for the missionaries in Africa, Scheller, an Alaska Airlines captain, says he inspired her to be a pilot.

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***"They just did it from their heart. They wanted to help people — they didn't want press or glory..."***

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"He had a passion for aviation — for everything related to aviation — it just exuded out of him," she said. "I would not be a pilot today if it weren't for him."

By the time Donovan and Fay decided it was time to leave Africa and return to their careers as pilots — Donovan was engaged to be married and Fay had a wife and six kids to get back to — Bishop Houlihan had enlisted St. Louis businessman, Bill Edwards, for help in raising money to send a second, more durable plane to support the missionaries in Kenya.

Elizabeth Donovan recalled that her husband and Fay "liked Bill Edwards a lot and knew he would do the right thing with the organization."

"They didn't want just anyone taking it over. They had a specific desire to grow Wings of Hope into an organization for everybody, not just Catholics," she said.

Edwards engaged his friend Joe Fabick, president of Fabick Tractor Co., in the fundraising campaign. And the two men recruited George Haddaway, publisher of Flight magazine, and Paul Rodgers, vice president of Ozark Airlines, to join them in what was supposed to be a one-time effort to send another plane to Africa. But as more requests for help came in, Edwards, Fabick, Haddaway and Rodgers would eventually grow the effort Donovan and Fay had started into a nonprofit called Wings of Hope.

The rest, as they say, is history.

## Meet Brock

Five-year-old Brock was a "beautiful, chubby baby," according to his mom, Emily. But once he transitioned off formula, he couldn't tolerate solid foods and wasn't gaining weight.

"He kept growing taller but getting thinner and thinner," said Emily.

Doctors in Brock's rural Illinois hometown were stumped, so the family started taking him to nearby St. Louis for treatment. Emily said that while this helped, to a degree, "we just reached a plateau where things kept getting worse and worse."

"We wanted to get a comprehensive second opinion just to see if there was something we could do to make his daily quality of life better," she said.

Last year, Wings of Hope flew Brock and Emily seven times roundtrip to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

While Mayo hasn't yet found a definitive reason for Brock's symptoms, they have helped him gain weight by surgically implanting a gastrostomy tube and streamlined his medications through comprehensive testing.

"They were able to do so many tests so quickly," said Emily. "One test, when I first reached out to Mayo, we were able to get that test three weeks later. In St. Louis, it would have taken five or six months just to get that test scheduled and complete and another five to six weeks to get the results."

When your child is not thriving, finding fast solutions is critical.

"By being able to go to Mayo, we were able to speed up the timeline for improving his daily quality of life," said Emily. "They really have increased his daily functionality and overall happiness."

Flying with Wings of Hope saved Brock and Emily a nine-hour one way drive to Mayo, which Emily would have had to make solo while her husband was at home with their other three children.

"It's mentally, emotionally and physically exhausting being the only caregiver for him while we were at Mayo," she said. "To be able to fly and then just drive an hour home, instead of a nine-hour drive, was so nice."

Besides alleviating the cost of flying commercially to the Mayo Clinic, flying with Wings of Hope allowed Emily to easily bring along all of Brock's medications and food supplies.

"Even before he had a g-tube, he was on a soft, mashable diet — so lots of food pouches and formulas which are really hard to take through TSA," she said. "This way, I was able to pack whatever I needed and have it with me instead of in a checked bag."

As for Brock, he likes flying — especially when it gets a little choppy.

"He likes the turbulence," said Emily. "Not that we ran into much, but he was like 'ooh it's like a rollercoaster. Again!'"





IN THE *Spotlight*

# ELSA KLARICH

## Crewed and Uncrewed Aviation Consultant

### What's your living situation in Tanzania?

I've lived in Tanzania for over 10 years now. My living situation here is pretty simple. I rent a small cottage just outside of Arusha. I have a basic backup solar system because my power goes off just about every day.

I have my two dogs with me and a little rescue cat. My dogs are basically my protection. They help keep me safe here. They warn me when anyone's coming and let me know if there's anything amiss. My day-to-day life is I work mostly remote. I also volunteer here in Tanzania doing nourishment and malnourishment programs for little ones in the community.

Arusha's inland. I actually have a little plot on the beach on the Indian Ocean, and when I'm there I live in huts. I built a banda, which is a traditional, thatched-roof hut, and it's on stilts. I'm in between a mangrove and the ocean, so if water comes up from the mangrove, I'm on stilts. It's really fun. I'm able to bring my dogs down to the beach, and we have a lot of freedom. It's a beautiful remote area. Most people wouldn't be able to get there on their own.

I have a Land Cruiser 4-wheel drive that gets me in and out of really remote rocky, muddy places. I'm very blessed to have a very good car that has a snorkel, a winch, all of the bush capabilities that I need living here. The road that I have in Arusha is terrible. It gets washed away every rainy season. If I had a small car, I'd get stuck every day.

On the coast, it's very remote. When I go there, I do have internet, amazingly enough, and I'm able to work at the beach. So it's not always just a holiday. No electricity, composting toilet, very off grid. I have some solar panels and some backup batteries to help me charge my computer and my phone. I have solar lights that I put up. I do have running water from a well but the water's pretty brackish, so I bring water from town and use a filtration system to be able to drink water.

My life is camping. No part of it is glamorous.

It's beautiful and always an adventure.

Elsa Klarich has been volunteering, flying or consulting for Wings of Hope for over 10 years. Many know her from her days bush flying for our partner, Flying Medical Service, in Tanzania. These days, she's consulting for organizations, including Wings of Hope, on how to use uncrewed aircraft systems (aka drones) — especially how to use them for humanitarian purposes. We asked Elsa to update us on her work and life in Tanzania.

### Tell me about your work with drones? What are you doing as a consultant — and what are you doing for Wings of Hope?

I studied uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) in university with the idea that someday drones would be the future of aviation. I have worked as an instructor, maintainer and operator of drones. I have my part 107 license with the FAA, and I fly recreationally with my DJI drone just for fun.

I currently work in drone regulations policy and safety culture development as a consultant. My work focuses on traditional aviation as well as uncrewed aviation but I'm really trying to focus on the drone side of things.

When I started consulting for Wings of Hope, it was to develop a UAS drone program plan and toolkit for partners who were interested in utilizing drones as a supplemental tool to traditional aircraft. For example, when they are unable to use their traditional aircraft due to weather, maintenance, airstrips and, of course, things such as the pandemic, utilizing drones helps protect people and helps protect our partners who are serving indigenous people groups in their respective countries.

Regulation and policy work is the biggest issue at the moment. The technology is there but one of the biggest issues for global humanitarian work — and any kind of drone work that's more commercial — is the development of regulations.

### What value do drones have in humanitarian work?

Drones are incredibly important within the humanitarian space. They're being used as a tool that can really help mitigate risk — they protect people. They're being used in disaster relief mitigation work, medical cargo delivery, mapping, surveying, urban hospital deliveries, the list goes on. Drones are a tool that can provide a better balance and safer method of blood supply, antivenom and vaccine deliveries without having to use traditional crewed aircraft. It's a tool that can be used as a supplement to our traditional bush flying program.

### Do you miss your work as a bush pilot? How does your current work compare?

I make sure to stay current as a bush pilot. I've had some amazing instructors at Wings of Hope who have donated time to help me stay current. I will always be a bush pilot at heart. I do miss it, but I don't really compare the work because I still utilize all of it. I'm hopeful by continuing my work with the amazing team at Wings of Hope that I'll be able to continue sharing my experiences, my life, my expertise in crewed aviation and uncrewed aviation and program development work to be able to make the world a better place. I try to encompass it all for sure — and I really enjoy it.



# SOAR into STEM Helps Launch Student's Future

Lisha Maganti is headed off to the University of Colorado Boulder in the fall to study aerospace engineering. Although the Marquette High School graduate always knew she wanted to study engineering, she credits Wings of Hope with steering her toward aerospace.

"Before working with Wings of Hope, I wanted to go into engineering because I did robotics in middle school and



Lisha Maganti (right) and fellow SOAR into STEM student.

freshman and sophomore year of high school," she said. Maganti was a student in Wings of Hope's SOAR into STEM program in 2022, followed by a summer internship at Wings of Hope and two sessions as a SOAR into STEM mentor. She said working with Wings of Hope's mechanics, many of whom are retired engineers or pilots, opened her eyes to the possibility of pursuing aerospace engineering.

"So I started looking at aerospace engineering jobs, and last summer I worked as an aerospace research intern at Saint Louis University. That's where I started wanting to do aerospace engineering," said Maganti.

Looking back on her time as a SOAR into STEM student, Maganti said the discovery flight is an experience she'll never forget.

"That was just really cool; I wrote my college essay about the first time I flew."

Beyond studying aerospace engineering, Maganti also plans to pursue an MBA.

"I'm hoping to combine business and aerospace engineering," she said. "I know that a lot of people want to work at NASA or Boeing. I feel like there are a lot of new tech startups that I'd want to be involved in."

No matter where Maganti's interest in aerospace engineering leads, it began in the Wings of Hope hangar.

"I don't think I would have realized I wanted to do aerospace unless I did the internship and the SOAR into STEM program at Wings of Hope," she said.

## New — and Familiar — Faces Around Wings of Hope



Brittni Snidle, Director of  
Development & Communications



Holly Berthold,  
Director of Philanthropy



Lee Ann Nolte,  
Education Programs Manager

Wings of Hope is happy to announce some recent personnel changes among our staff and board members.

In March, we welcomed **Brittni Snidle** as our new director of development and communications. Snidle replaced **Holly Berthold** who is now director of philanthropy, a new role focused on major gifts. Snidle comes to us with over 10 years' experience in nonprofit communications and development from Kids in the Middle, Queen of Peace Center and, most recently, Christian Brothers College High School. She holds a master's degree in public relations from Webster University. Before entering the nonprofit field, she worked in radio for Emmis Communications and at a public relations firm in Clayton.

Last October, **Lee Ann Nolte** joined Wings of Hope as our new education programs manager in charge of leading our SOAR into STEM program. Nolte's prior experience includes 18 years teaching high school math and working in several roles at Trans World Airlines.



Angela Walleman, Vice President  
and Director of Programs



Lena Pak,  
Director of Administration

Wings of Hope also promoted **Angela Walleman** to vice president and director of programs and **Lena Pak** to director of administration.

The Wings of Hope Board of Directors elected two new members at its March 2024 meeting.



Larry Dalton,  
New Board Member



Dana Steffey,  
New Board Member

**Larry Dalton** is a retired sales and marketing executive and former business owner in the HVAC industry. His 45-year career includes forming Classic Aire Care in 2000, which grew into one of St. Louis's largest residential service and replacement contractors with nearly 200 full-time employees.

**Dana Steffey** is president and CEO of Secure Data Technologies, Inc. A US Air Force veteran who served 12 years working in advanced avionics and electronic warfare, Steffey spent a large portion of his career stateside but also traveled to Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the '90s. After his military career, Steffey earned his stripes in enterprise space learning from industry giants such as Lockheed Martin, Seagate, GE Capital and AT&T before founding Secure Data Technologies 16 years ago.

Other board changes include the election of David Agee as new chairman and Patrick Bowen as vice chairman. With immense gratitude, we also said good-bye to three board members: Cameron Conway, Nikki Bodie and Dr. Rollin Jackson.

# Meet Wings of Hope's New Avionics Technician: AMANDA HILL

**A**manda Hill doesn't fit the typical profile of an aviation mechanic: She's young — now 32, she graduated with her A&P/IA certification 13 years ago — and she's a lot more interested in the wires and electronics that keep a plane flying than its gears and mechanics.

We sat down with Amanda to ask about her journey to working on avionics in the Wings of Hope hangar.

## **Have you always wanted to do this?**

Yes and no. I love aviation, and I really wanted to be a pilot. That's the first thing I thought I wanted to do. But I also love working on things.

I went to an airshow (as a teen), and I walked up to my very favorite — best, in my opinion, designed aircraft ever made — and that was a B-2. I walked up to the B-2 and there was a pilot, so I asked him questions: How do you work without a rudder system? How's this work? And he said, "I don't know. I just push a button."

And I thought, I don't want to be you. Because I have no desire to know what it's like to fly. I want to know how it works — and not just design one, I like hands on. I didn't want to be an engineer at a desk designing something; I wanted to be physically involved in fixing the problems.

Airplanes are cool, the designing is cool — but what I love is fixing problems, fixing broken things.

## **Why avionics?**

Most mechanics can't stand wires. I remember at A&P school, we had an aircraft that was all taken apart. Years ago, all wires in an airplane had to be white — you could not have colored wires in an aircraft. So I looked into this jet and the interior was pulled apart and there were thousands of white wires everywhere. Most people said, "I don't want anything to do with that." And I thought, "That looks like a fun puzzle."

## **How unusual is it for an A&P/IA mechanic to also be skilled in avionics?**

As an A&P/IA mechanic who loves working on the electrical side of the aircraft, I'm an odd duck.

You've got electrical people who don't want to work on the mechanical side and mechanics who don't want to work on the electrical systems. I've found that there are very few mechanics who know both.

I love both sides of it.

## **How has understanding both the electrical and mechanical sides of aviation helped you?**

When somebody calls and they say they have an issue — when I run up my engine, I've got this noise in my headset that won't go away — I'm able to ask: Did it happen during a mag drop? OK, you're introducing noise in the engine which is back feeding its way into the aircraft so look in this direction.



I've had so many people on the avionics side sit around me during those conversations and ask, "How did you know?" Well, if you knew how the engine works, you know what might be causing the issue. But because you've never learned the engine side of it, you don't know what you're missing.

There's a huge gap. They can wire it, but once it interfaces with the aircraft, they're lost.

## **You work in the Wings of Hope hangar one to two days per week. What are you doing the rest of the time?**

I'm an on-call avionics person. So when there are radios to be installed or issues on an airplane, I go to where the airplane is.

I'm also contracted with four other maintenance shops. We have a lack of avionics technicians in the world right now. These shops are stuck with airplanes that physically can't leave because their wiring is not done.

I work from home a lot. I bring projects in, and I set up a table in my living room. And that actually works because I can be home and work — and take care of the kids. I have three kids — ages 2, 6 and 8 — and my husband is a pastor. I've got a little setup for the kids so they can help strip wire and play with wire. At least two out of my three have an interest in something very hands-on.

I'm also a professional photographer on the weekends.

## **What do you like about working at Wings of Hope?**

I always wanted to be involved in aviation and missions — but it's never worked out in my favor. I tried for some different overseas opportunities, and it didn't work out. Working at Wings of Hope is a way for me to do what I want to do with aviation and missions.

I love what we do here.

# Thank You

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