



Welcome to AeroStar News!

Women Taking Flight, *The NOW Generation*



Dear AeroStar Family and Friends,

This month, Team AeroStar celebrates Women's History Month! Can you imagine, but once upon a time, women designing, building, repairing, or piloting an airplane was unthinkable. Navigating a rocket in space or serving aboard the International Space Station was simply unimaginable. Only in science fiction did we see Lieutenant Uhuru, the Starfleet officer from the United States of Africa, in charge of communications on the Starship Enterprise.

Today, what was once unimaginable is now reality. In every walk of life, to paraphrase Beyoncé, women run the world, and in few fields is the impact of women more powerfully felt than in aviation and aerospace.

I can think of no better moment to celebrate the women of aviation/aerospace than during Women's History Month. Reflecting on my own involvement in aviation, from my first flight at age 16 with the Chicago Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, I was hooked. I was one of only a handful of female students majoring in aviation management at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale in the late 1990s. As a business manager at Landrum & Brown, the aviation consulting firm, I was usually the only woman in the boardroom. During those early years, I knew I was involved in something special. I was standing on the shoulders of women, like my shero Bessie Coleman, like Amelia Earhart and so many others, who charted the course before me.

STEM Education for Girls

To create equity for women in aviation, as a nation, we must do more to engage female students in STEM. According to [Girls Who Code](#), 74% of middle school girls express an interest in engineering, science, and math, but only 0.3% choose computer science as a major when they get to college. Black and Latina women are even more underrepresented in STEM education and careers.

Not surprisingly, the same disparities exist in the aviation/aerospace workforce. I recently

attended an FAA task force subcommittee meeting to discuss the current state of women in aviation. Rebecca K. Lutte, PhD, from the Omaha Aviation Institute (U of Nebraska), presented the following data highlighting the percentage of women in aviation careers:

- Maintenance technicians – 2.5%
- Airline executives (CEO, COO) – 3%
- Airline pilots – 5%
- Total certificated pilots – 7.9%
- Aerospace engineers, dispatchers, airport managers, air traffic controllers, aviation high education leadership, cybersecurity – 11-20%
- FAA employees, aviation higher education faculty – 21-30%

Furthermore, according to [Sisters of the Skies](#), African American women pilots represent less than one-half of 1% of the total professional pilot career field.

Clearly, more work needs to be done.

And Still We Rise

Successful women are showing us the way. During our Black History Month celebration of Black Aviation Excellence – BAE Day 2021 – several dynamic African American women who are charting exciting pathways in the aviation/aerospace workforce generously shared their experiences. The complete lineup included:

- Myron and Tierra Fletcher (Keynote Speakers) – Rocket with the Fletchers, NASA Rocket Scientists
- Lt. Colonel Jason O. Harris (Panelist) – Special Operations Pilot and USAF Academy Instructor
- Kimberly McCommon (Panelist) – JetBlue Airways Pilot
- Quinton McNair (Panelist) – US Army Helicopter Mechanic (Retired) and Bakery Entrepreneur
- Kari Orme (Panelist) – Airport Operations Supervisor II, Department of Aviation
- Captain William (CJ) Charlton (Panelist) – United Airlines Pilot
- Alexis Brownlow (Moderator) – Wendell Phillips Academy #1 Ranked Student and AeroStar Intern
- Troy Bailey (Event Co-Host) – AeroStar Alum and President, Lewis University OBAP (Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals)

BAE Day 2021 was *the* virtual event of the school year! If you missed this outstanding youth conference, you can view it [here](#). African American women from across the industry spoke about their experiences as pilots, engineers, airport supervisors, and leaders. I've been in this industry for more than two decades, and even I was inspired by the stories of these amazing women.

Generation NOW!

At AeroStar, girls are 50% of our student base. Our training courses are designed to spark girls' interest in STEM subjects. In the process, their STEM confidence grows and classroom performance in STEM subjects improves.

In this issue, you'll meet AeroStar alums, Selena Berry and Mercedes Oliver. Thanks to the generosity of Urban Intellectuals, Inc. and Real Estate Profit Lab, these young women were each awarded a \$1,500 scholarship toward their future accomplishments.

A special *muchas gracias* goes to our Marketing & Media Advisory Board member, Jacqueline S. Ruiz, for serving as this issue's guest contributor for our exciting "Latinas in Aviation" feature. Jackie even wrote a fantastic book by the same name! Purchase your copy [here](#).

We are proud of our girls who demonstrate fearlessness in taking on subjects that were once thought to be the domain of men. No more! Like BAE Day 2021 co-keynote speaker Tiera Fletcher said, "The sky is not the limit. We're making rockets that are going to Mars!"

Giving Wings to Dreams!

Did you know...

Dr. Mae Jemison, the first African American woman astronaut, attended Morgan Park High School on Chicago's South Side!



The Women of BAE Day 2021

Hundreds of students from Chicago and Northwest Indiana attended AeroStar's 1st Annual Black History Month Salute to Black Aviation Excellence (BAE Day 2021) on February 26th. Leading experts in aviation and aerospace discussed African American contributions to the industry—past, present, and future. The purpose of the event was to raise awareness among students 5th-8th grades about the broad array of career choices in aviation and aerospace.

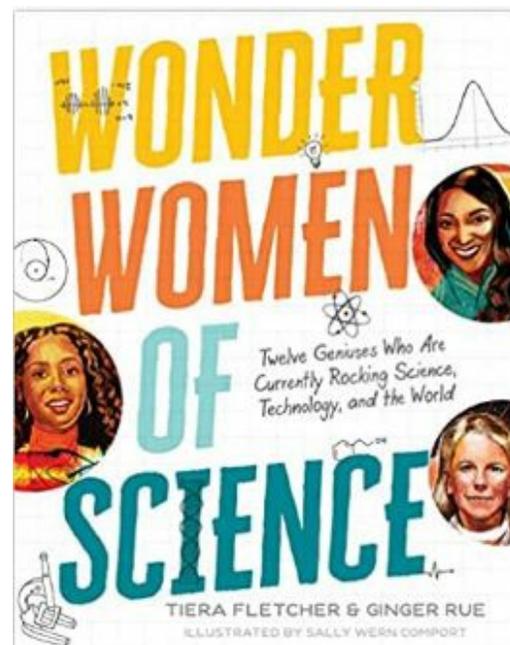
We salute the following women who made BAE Day 2021 a success!



Tiera Fletcher, Co-Keynote Speaker

- Structural Engineer, Boeing
- Co-Founder, Rocket with the Fletchers
- Author, *Wonder Women of Science: How 12 Geniuses Are Rocking Science, Technology, and the World*

"The one barrier I had was believing in myself. Finding mentors made all the difference."





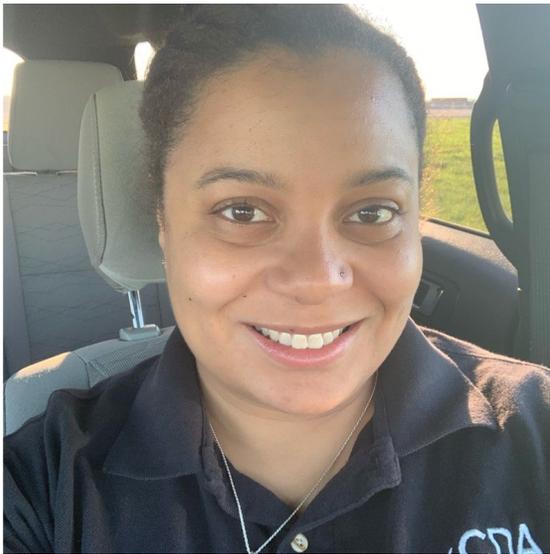
Jamie L. Rhee, Special Guest
Commissioner
Chicago Department of Aviation

"Getting started early is key. As a little farm girl, I never dreamed in a million years that I would be running one of the busiest airport systems in the world. Youth are our greatest asset, and they will be the future of aviation."



Kimberly McCommon, Panelist
Co-Founder & Vice President Emeritus,
AeroStar Avion Institute

"What's in your toolkit? All the resources you pick up along the way enhance Black aviation excellence. If you want it, you can make it happen!"



Keri Orme, Panelist
Airport Operations Supervisor II
Department of Aviation

"We need to start seeing more faces like ours. When I get on a plane, it's comforting to see a Black pilot. We need to feel more included."



Alexis Brownlow, Moderator
Wendell Phillips Academy
Ranked #1 Senior Student

"Aviation is proof that we have the capacity to achieve the impossible!"

Latinas in Aviation

We are delighted to feature the first guest contributor of AeroStar News, Jacqueline S. Ruiz. Born in Mexico City, Ms. Ruiz moved to the United States at age 14 where she learned English and German. This "dream catcher" is a visionary social entrepreneur,

speaker, author, publisher, philanthropist, and licensed pilot. She is dedicated to helping women achieve lives of significance. Ruiz has created two award-winning companies and two nonprofit organizations, published more than a dozen books, created many products, and held dozens of events around the world in just the past decade. Her current book, *Latinas in Aviation: Stories of Passion, Power, and Breaking Into the Aviation Industry*, is destined to become a global bestseller! To purchase, click [here](#).

I Can See Clearly Now By Jacqueline S. Ruiz



The first time I developed a love of general aviation was when my husband, Juan Pablo, and I saw a little plane at a hot air balloon show in 2014. We decided to buy a discovery flight and that's when my interest took off, so to speak. At another time that summer, I remember, we flew in this small plane with no doors. I instantly fell in love with the freedom that experience gave me; it was so beautiful.

Through a series of events, I knew the aviation bug was calling me. This calling was intercepting my life in different ways and that mesmerized me. I received what I call a "divine download" and decided to become a pilot. It was such a strong affirmation in my mind that I had tears coming down my cheeks. I said that I was going to be a pilot as a hobby, and I didn't care what I had to go through to achieve my dream.

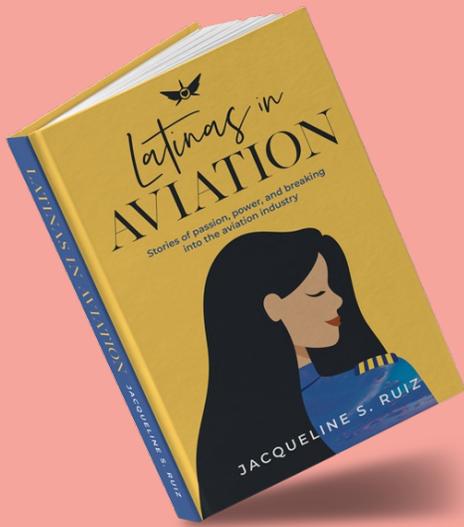
After putting in many training hours, I received my official pilot's license on July 7, 2018.

Spreading my wings didn't mean just enjoying flying through skies. I wanted to personally share my new love by creating connections with people and having them accompany me on short flights. So far, my youngest passenger was five and my oldest was 80.

The sky was the limit in terms of creativity. I developed the #Pilotina brand and, at many promotional events, gave away more than 500 teddy bears to encourage others to fly high with their dreams. I also created scholarships for those who wanted to get into aviation. My online workshop, "Make Your Flight Plan," helps people become their own good pilots in their personal lives, careers, projects, or businesses.

My six-year journey in flight has prompted me to live by my motto: "Taking off is optional, landing on your dreams is mandatory." Never give up!

Latinas in Aviation by Jacqueline S. Ruiz is a celebration of the rarest women in the industry, told through stories of their triumphs, their falls, and their most crowning achievements. Hear from retired veterans as well as new graduates, pilots, aviation administrators, military, and civilians, all with a unique passion for aviation and its impact on our world. Each author inspires, entertains, and sets the stage for the next generation of Latinas



who look to the sky with a dream. To purchase, click [here](#).

Following are just a few of the contributors to *Latinas in Aviation*. Some 20 professionals generously contributed their aviation journeys in all!



Evelyn R. Miralles

- Former NASA Chief Engineer
- Trained NASA astronauts to Spacewalk
- Wrote the Preface, *Latinas in Aviation*

"I believe that the aviation industry should continue to develop an awareness of the need for a more diverse workforce, and it should take decisive action to reach out to women. Aeronautics, aviation, and aerospace sciences are complex endeavors, with distinct components varying from design and engineering operations to management. Therefore, women desiring to have careers in these fields should have educational experiences in multiple disciplines in order to be fully prepared. For this reason, it is important to create a pipeline with varied female talent, to open up and provide the opportunity to gain experiences in multiple segments of the industry." (Excerpted from the Preface.)



Amanda Grace Colón

- Aircraft Mechanic & Accident Investigator
- Contributing author, *Latinas in Aviation*

"I hope to go to Mars someday."

Linda Pfeiffer Pauwels

- First Latina Captain of American Airlines
- American Airlines Boeing 787 Captain & Check Airman
- Contributing author, *Latinas in Aviation*

"My favorite aircraft is the Boeing 787. The way it feels when it flies is incredible."



Shakar Soltani

- Bachelor of Arts in business administration in marketing, Texas Woman's University
- Intern, Southwest Airlines
- Flight Attendant, Spirit Airlines
- Career goal: Pilot

"People with my upbringing don't normally do what I'm so lucky to do. I want to change that. I often times wonder what I did to deserve this beautiful life I live. I'm so grateful."

#Pilotina Scholarship Awarded to Shakar Soltani

Congratulations to Shakar Soltani, the first recipient of the \$5,000 #Pilotina scholarship! #Pilotina is open to women ages 18 to 25 of Latin American origin or descent who live in the United States, are pursuing a STEM degree, and are seeking to enter aviation or aerospace.

#Pilotina is funded from *Latinas in Aviation* book sales. "I want to support young Latinas who want to enter the aviation and aerospace industries," says the book's author, Jacqueline Ruiz. "I'm committed with all my heart to help them while I pursue my next license and ratings as a pilot."

To apply for a #Pilotina scholarship, click [here](#) for details. Deadline: December 25, 2021.

AeroStar Alums Selected for Corporate Scholarships

Congratulations to AeroStar alums, Selena Berry and Mercedes Oliver. Mercedes is the recipient of the Urban Intellectuals S.T.E.A.M. Scholarship (S.T.E.A.M. – Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics), and Selena is the recipient of Real Estate Profit Lab S.T.E.A.M. Scholarship. The \$1,500 awards will be used to pay for Selena's and Mercedes' A&P exams. Many thanks to Freddie Oliver of [Urban Intellectuals, Inc.](#) and Danielle Pierce of [Real Estate Profit Lab](#) for financially supporting our AeroStar alums!



Selena Berry

- Aviation Instructor, AeroStar
- Bachelor of Science, Aircraft Maintenance & Management, Lewis University (2020)
- Former cadet of Tuskegee Next
- Former student of After School Matters
- AeroStar Aviation Exploration

"I grew up on the south side of Chicago not knowing what exactly I wanted to do. Meeting Mrs. Holmes helped me put the thread in the needle. She knew I wanted to be a teacher, but she helped me see I could be a teacher for a great purpose. She inspired me to inspire other young men and women like me. That was one of the greatest teachings of my life. I am grateful for the opportunity!"



Mercedes Oliver

- Aviation Instructor, AeroStar
- Bachelor of Science, Aircraft Maintenance & Management, Lewis University
- Member, Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals
- AHP (Aviation Fraternity)

"AeroStar has provided me with the opportunity to grow, make connections, and become an aviation professional. Thanks to AeroStar, I will be obtaining my A&P license and bachelor's degree this year. I will never forget that AeroStar has propelled my career!"



It is important for organizations serving the African American community to support one another. Few are more worthy of support than the AeroStar Avion Institute. Urban Intellectuals (UI) is proud to award "stellar" alum Mercedes Oliver a \$1,500 scholarship to support payment of her A&P exam.

UI's mission is "to change the world by educating generations of people about the global contributions to humanity by the African diaspora." The future of aviation is in good hands with the students of AeroStar, and we're proud to be a part of the journey!

For more information on Urban Intellectuals, visit our [website](#).



Freddie Taylor
Founder/CEO
Urban Intellectuals, Inc.

Women Supporting Women!

Danielle Pierce's scholarship award of \$1,500 to AeroStar alum Selena Berry is the type of feel-good story we love and is in keeping with the spirit of Women's History Month.

For more information on Danielle's Real Estate Profit Lab programs and events, click [here](#).



Danielle Pierce
Founder/CEO
Real Estate Profit Lab

**AeroStar Training: Your Ticket to Fly!
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2. Intro to Aerospace Engineering
3. Intro to Helicopters
4. Drone Licensing
5. Intro to Rocketry
6. Private Pilot Ground School



Book Teaches Kids to Fly Through Fear

What if you were afraid to fly? Authors Kenyatta Scott and Tammera L. Holmes join forces to show girls and boys how to face their fears!



Tammera L. Holmes Teaches Violet How to Fly Through Fear!

Follow along as ***Violet Takes Flight*** for the first time! Daddy teaches her and her brother Derek the true meaning of "doing it afraid." Follow along as Pilot Holmes makes her literary debut as Violet's flight teacher!

30% of all book sales support AeroStar Avion Institute, NFP, a female, minority owned NFP that teaches underrepresented youth in underserved neighborhoods about aviation STEM careers.

Buy your copy of ***Violet Takes Flight*** [HERE](#) today!

#thevioletbookseries
#wingstodreams

Make A Tax Deductible Gift Today!

One person *can* make a difference. Your generosity will help the AeroStar Avion Institute train and prepare students—K-12, college, and beyond—to pursue the aviation and aerospace careers of their dreams!

AeroStar is building the fastest growing talent pipeline connecting students in underrepresented communities to lucrative careers in aviation and aerospace. From our training and mentoring programs, we have launched corporate and military careers, and we've sent students to college on scholarship.

Please donate!

Our goals for 2021 are our boldest yet. In addition to our virtual and in-class training programs, we will launch apprenticeships in Aircraft Maintenance and Flight, moving students one step closer to careers in the industry. Apprenticeships will enable deserving students to learn and master an aviation trade on the job. This is a game changer for students in underrepresented communities.

We're fired up about our mission to train and employ youth in this exciting industry, and we need your help more than ever before. To give, click **HERE**. Your donation is tax deductible, and 100% of your gift goes toward training the next generation of aviation and aerospace professionals.

Invest in the passion ... the mission ... DONATE NOW!

Give Wings to Dreams!

ON THE RADAR

The following are women-friendly STEM, mentoring, and aviation/aerospace resources. Many of these organizations offer scholarships!

Sisters of the Skies. Vision: To develop pathways and partnerships to increase the number of black women in the professional pilot career field. sistersoftheskies.org

Women In Aviation International. Provides year-round resources to assist women in aviation and to encourage young women to consider aviation as a career. Offers educational outreach programs to educators, aviation industry members, and young people nationally and internationally. wai.org

The Ninety-Nines International, Chicago Area Chapter. Mission: To promote advancement of aviation through education, scholarships, and mutual support while honoring our unique history and sharing our passion for flight. chicagoarea99s.org

Girls Like Me. Shares inspiring content curated with pretty aesthetics in mind. Provides group mentoring experiences and small group resources for an interactive community of like-minded girls and women. girlslikemeinc.com

Ladies of Virtue. Mission: To instill purpose, passion, and perseverance in girls, ages 9 to 18, while preparing them for college, careers and to become change agents in their communities. lovechicago.org

Polished Pebbles. Mission: To help girls become great communicators at home, school, and the future workplace. polishedpebbles.com

#Pilotina Scholarship. Awarded to young Latinas interested in aviation and aerospace. latinasinaviation.com

Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals (OBAP). Objective: To increase minority participation in aerospace through exposure, training, mentoring and scholarships. obap.org

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